

Being Muslim in South Asia: Diversity and Daily Life

Robin Jeffrey and Sen Ronojoy

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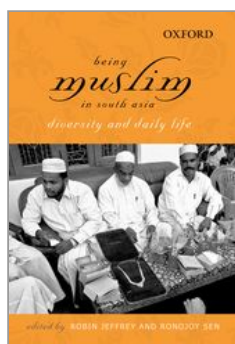
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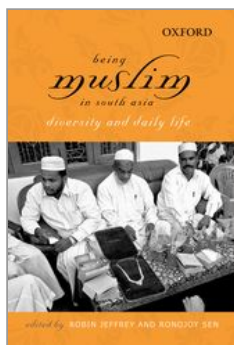
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(p.ix) Abbreviations

AL

Awami League

BNP

Bangladesh Nationalist Party

CAB

Conciliation and Arbitration Board

CE

Common Era

CIA

Central Intelligence Agency

d.

'died' (indicating date of death)

EC

Election Commission

EU

European Union

FATA

Federally Administered Tribal Areas

HUJI

Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami

IB

Intelligence Bureau

ICAB

International Conciliation and Arbitration Board

ICT

International Crimes Tribunal

IFA

Indian Football Association

IM
Indian Mujahideen
ISAS
Institute of South Asian Studies
ISI
Inter-Services Intelligence
JI
Jamaat-e-Islami
JUH
Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind
LeT
Lashkar-e-Taiba
LTTE
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MP
Member of Parliament
(p.x) NATO
North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO
Non-governmental Organization
NWFP
North-West Frontier Province
OBC
Other Backward Caste
OIC
Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
PIPS
Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies
PMLN
Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)
POTA
Prevention of Terrorism Act
RSS
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAFMA
South Asia Free Media Association
SC
Scheduled Caste
SIMI
Students' Islamic Movement of India
SLR
Sri Lankan Rupees
ST
Scheduled Tribe

Abbreviations

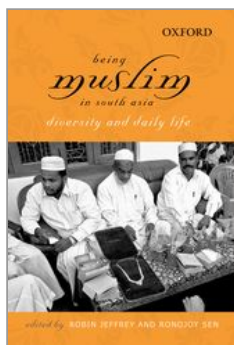
UNDP

United Nations Development Programme

WAMY

World Assembly of Muslim Youth

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(p.xi) Acknowledgements

This book originated from a regular Friday-morning meeting in the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore in mid-2011. The chairman of ISAS, Gopinath Pillai, a distinguished Singaporean businessman and diplomat, observed that ‘we should know more about Muslim life in South Asia’. One thing led to another, as things often do at ISAS, and an international workshop took shape, queries went out to scholars around the world, and two years later, this book is the result.

We thank Mr Pillai for the initial impetus and support, and we are particularly grateful to the Director of ISAS, Professor Tan Tai Yong, an outstanding historian of Punjab and modern South Asia, for his unfailing willingness to back the project.

The staff of ISAS provided the customary logistic support that makes working there such a privilege. Among our colleagues, many of whom were wise and sympathetic advisers, we have especially to thank Pratima Singh for her help in the preparation and grooming of the manuscript.

One of the advantages of working at the National University of Singapore is ready access to an excellent cartography unit, and we thank the remarkable Mrs Lee Li Kheng for drawing new maps for the book.

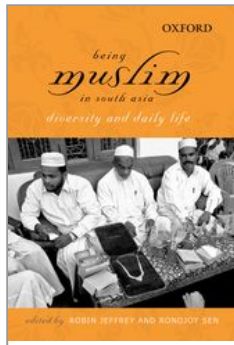
(p.xii) Finally, we thank the contributors for their patience and diligence. We hope they will find that the book as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that it goes some way towards fostering a keener understanding of what it is to be Muslim in South Asia.

Robin Jeffrey and Ronojoy Sen

Melbourne and Singapore

January 2014

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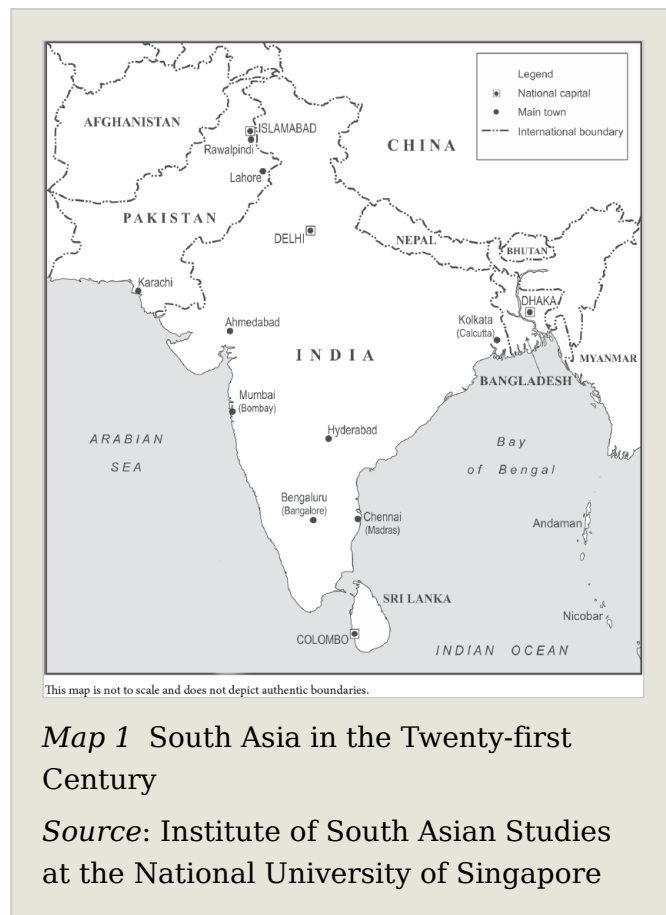
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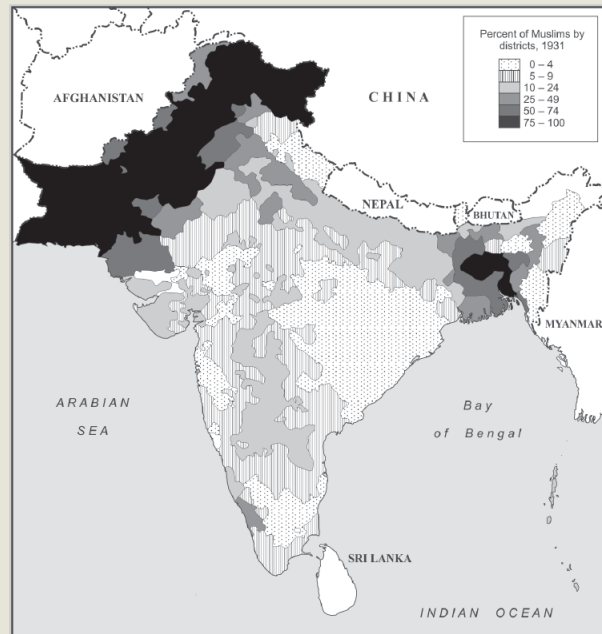
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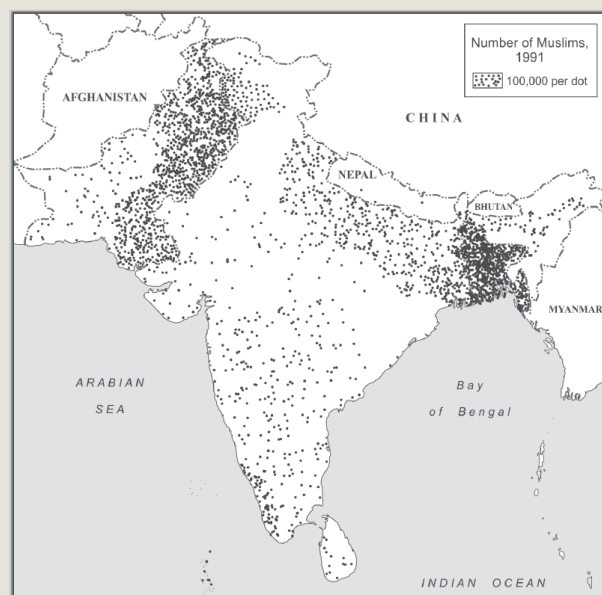
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This map is not to scale and does not depict authentic boundaries.

Map 2 Distribution of Muslims, 1931

Source: Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore

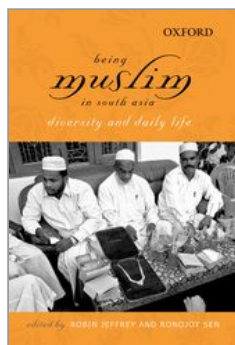


This map is not to scale and does not depict authentic boundaries.

Map 3 Distribution of Muslims, 1991

Source: Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore

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(p.xvi) Introduction

Diversity and Daily Life

More than a quarter of the world's people are Muslims. About one-third (more than 500 million people) live in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, the countries of South Asia. Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are the second-, third-, and fourth-largest Muslim countries in the world, surpassed only by Indonesia.

The religion of Islam often captured the attention of the English-speaking world after the devastation of 11 September 2001, but it was usually with a relentless focus on terror and conflict. Such preoccupation, eclipsing interest in the daily lives of South Asia's Muslims, was mistaken and misleading. In 2011, the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore determined to explore how Muslims in South Asia lived in the twenty-first century—how, in the words of South Asian English, they 'pulled on', thought about themselves, related to their governments, educated their children, earned livings, connected to the world, and spent their leisure time. **(p.xvii)** The aim was to emphasize the many strands of thought and practice that go into the daily experiences of hundreds of millions of people.

Members of the ISAS recognized that Islam in South Asia had many facets, and a workshop in September 2011 brought together scholars who could cast light on some of these variations. The workshop assembled scholars from seven countries and underlined the diversity of experience that 'being Muslim' involved. We later called on additional contributors to try to create a book that would hint at the diversity that exists among the Muslims of South Asia and to highlight concerns and conditions of daily life in different places and among different groups.

In focusing on the diversity of Muslim experiences, we face a challenge: some Muslims hold that diversity is wrong, that where it exists it should be eliminated, and that to emphasize diversity represents a malicious attempt to divide believers. Such perspectives are not new. European Christianity provides a saga of attempts by one sect to impose its version of a single truth on others. For the scholars represented in this book, however, diversity is undeniable, and it is a diversity that exists under the broad mantle of the Quran.

Diversity should not be surprising. Islam reached South Asia at different times, through different means, propagated by different champions, and attracted different adherents. In discussions of Islam in South Asia, it is sometimes forgotten that the faith reached India within a few years of Prophet Muhammad's death. This was through the traders of Arabia who had been regularly sailing to Kerala from the first century of the Common Era (CE). Jews and Christians were among the early traders, so it was predictable that members of the new and dominant faith of Arabia—Islam—would arrive and settle in Malabar.¹ They founded what today is known as the Mappila community of Kerala 200 years before armies from Afghanistan brought Islam to the plains of Punjab and northern India. Islam came to Sindh in today's Pakistan in 711 CE, about the same time it arrived in Spain.

It is important to remember that the world before industrialism was a place of empires and conquests. Notions of 'nations' are modern. In **(p.xviii)** the 500 years from the time of Mahmud of Ghazni (971–1030), whose kingdom covered much of the north-west of the subcontinent and who was a near-contemporary of England's William the Conqueror (1028–1087), India experienced a succession of kingdoms and would-be empires, some ruled by Muslims, some by Hindus. The most successful of these enterprises in extending rule over agrarian societies was the Mughal empire, whose initial base was carved out by Babar (1483–1530), a contemporary of Henry VIII (1491–1547), at the beginning of the sixteenth century.² This book is not the place to examine the role of religion in pre-modern empires, though the ferocious and legendary politics of religion in Tudor England are worth recalling when we seek perspective on Mughal times. Unlike Henry VIII, Mughal rulers made no attempt to dictate the religion of their subjects.³

The creeping dominance of the English East India Company, and the establishment of a British empire in India, brought a state apparatus whose legacies haunt South Asia today. The colonial state counted, measured, categorized, recorded, and disseminated relentlessly. In so doing, it often stuffed its subjects into bureaucratic boxes of the colonial state's making, boxes that did not necessarily accord with the reality experienced by its subjects. Faced with new rules offering rewards and punishments, people adapted and used the rules to further their own interests. Categories like 'Hinduism' were written about in

English books and acquired concrete shapes in government reports. Such fixed-in-cement forms had not existed previously.

The colonial census reports, conducted every 10 years from the 1870s, created categories and assigned people to them. The printing and distribution of such reports provided officials with pictures of the territories they ruled, but such dissemination also gave the subjects of the Indian empire data on which to explain grievances and base petitions. Ideas about legal and civil rights accompanied these exercises in counting, categorizing, and recording. And along with credential-based education, bureaucratic employment, and codification of law **(p.xix)** came notions of ‘popular’ participation in government—voting, democracy, and ‘rights’ of the kind said to be enjoyed by Englishmen. The title of Dadabhai Naoroji’s critique of British rule, published in 1901, captured this spirit: *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*.

These practices of ‘modernity’—counting, categorizing, credentialing, recording, and disseminating—generated responses in South Asia that coloured the lives of individuals throughout the twentieth century. They also fostered growing calls for the rulers to be less ‘un-British’—calls for democratic rights. It is here that one can see the beginnings of twentieth-century political conflict. If elections and democracy required majorities to be assembled, on what basis would such mobilization take place? And if credentials were essential to occupy powerful positions in government, what were the social characteristics of people who acquired such credentials? In posing such questions innocently, one foreshadows contests and conflicts based on caste and religion. There were to be movements against ‘Brahmin dominance’, for example, and later to achieve a state in which Muslims themselves would be a majority and no longer threatened in a state in which ‘Hindus’ outnumbered them. Such considerations had not existed in the days of the Mughal empire or at the beginning of British rule. They had become possible as a result of the elaboration of the colonial state, and they created circumstances that affect the lives of Muslims in twenty-first-century South Asia. This consolidation and reification—the making into tangible categories of disparate individuals and groups—papered over vast diversities which continued to exist, but now had to find a place within stories of larger, yet artificially constructed groups.

There was conflict over how Muslims ought to behave in a rapidly changing world under alien rulers, as the chapters by Barbara D. Metcalf and Muhammad Khalid Masud in this book show. It would be wrong to overemphasize the transformation in communication and mobility that came with the railways-and-printing-press apparatus of the colonial state. The very fact of the *hajj*—the pilgrimage to Mecca—as one of the five pillars of Islam underlines the fact that men and women moved around the world even at the time of the Prophet. The mechanisms of modernity, however, made far larger numbers aware of the possibilities for movement and enabled them to travel. How was a faith based on

a sacred text to deal with such possibilities **(p.xx)** and with mechanical apparatus unknown when the holy work was composed? Khalid Masud encapsulates this question in the contest of ideas between Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Jamaluddin Afghani in the nineteenth century. Afghani has been little known in the West, but discussion of his travels, ideas, and influence received wider currency when Pankaj Mishra devoted a quarter of his best-selling *From the Ruins of Empire* to an analysis of Afghani's life.⁴

One might ask, 'Why focus on past contests of ideas among Muslim intellectuals in a book claiming to focus on daily life?' The answer of course is that 'ordinary people' have ideas, though they may not necessarily know their origins, and the ideas debated by the powerful often come to affect the lowly. Muhammad Khalid Masud, for example, concludes that in the contests at the end of the nineteenth century, 'Jamaluddin Afghani's political ideology of a universal caliphate dominated Muslim imaginations' and generally prevailed over Sayyid Ahmad Khan's calls for adaptation and change. 'Neglecting religious reforms and education, Muslim thought in South Asia,' Masud concludes sombrely, 'came to its present intellectual impasse.'

How did contests between established beliefs and new conditions unfold in the twentieth century? Barbara D. Metcalf provides thumbnail sketches of four Muslims thinkers and political actors: Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957), Abul A'la Maududi (1903–1979), and Maulana Ghulam Muhammad Vastanvi (born about 1958). Jinnah, the anglicized lawyer, became the father of a Pakistan whose ethos he did not live long enough to define. He seemed to envisage a state which would behave rather like the United Kingdom where the majority of people were protestant Christians and the head—the king—was recognized as the head of the Church of England. Though holidays and rhythms were protestant Christian, the state treated individuals as equal citizens. 'You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, *that has nothing to do with the business of the State*,' Metcalf quotes Jinnah. But Jinnah was dead thirteen months after independence, and other ideas, some stemming from Afghani's nineteenth-century visions, contended to become the intellectual underpinnings of Pakistan. The **(p.xxi)** ideas of Maulana Maududi, the third of Metcalf's thinkers, stood at an opposite pole from those of Jinnah. Maududi reached out through the medium of print to large numbers of Muslims with a message about the need for an Islamic state—not a state in which Muslims were simply a majority but one in which the tenets of Islam were woven minutely into the daily practice of government and social life.

The two other thinkers on whom Metcalf focuses illustrate the diversity that this book emphasizes. Each man developed alternative views of how Muslims in South Asia should relate to governments, the challenges of world capitalism, and the pervasiveness of modern states. Maulana Madani, a contemporary of Jinnah, remained in India in 1947. 'Nations are based on homelands, not religion,' he

wrote. How then could you have 'a nation' if its intended citizens were sprinkled across the subcontinent and lived interspersed with non-Muslims? There had to be other ways to look after the well-being of Muslims than trying to create 'a homeland' where logic seemed to show no such homeland could be realistically manufactured. Madani envisaged an independent India that would, in Professor Metcalf's words, 'favour no particular religion but engage in various ways to support all'. Madani's vision provided perhaps the most significant strategy for Muslims who remained in India after 1947; much of the Muslim elite of north India had however migrated to Pakistan. 'It was easier for them thereafter,' writes Attia Hosain in her wonderful novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, 'to visit the whole wide world than the home which had once been theirs.'⁵

Deoband, a town 160 kilometres north-east of Delhi, has provided ideas and learned scholars of Islam for well over a hundred years. The students of its seminary have had to find ways of adjusting to the modern world and the Indian state. Here, too, as Metcalf points out, different views contend. Maulana Ghulam Muhammad Vastanvi, briefly (in 2010–11) vice chancellor of Darul Uloom, the Deoband seminary, is an educator and Islamic scholar. But internal disputes, alleging his excessive progressiveness and softness towards the government of his native Gujarat, forced his resignation in 2011.⁶ It was (p.xxii) also said that as a Gujarati from a lower-status background, he faced prejudices from old, still influential, Urdu-speaking elite Muslim families of north India.

These contests of ideas and personalities over the past 150 years have translated into actions, policies, and institutions. Such dynamics produced the state of Pakistan itself. Yet it is clear from the chapters written by Masud and Metcalf that outcomes are contingent; they often depend on circumstances of the moment. The example of Maulana Vastanvi also illustrates the differences of geography, language, and social standing among Muslims of South Asia. Differing ideas about the practice of Islam in modern times were simply one aspect of the variations to be found among South Asian Muslims. Social class and language are others. In India, Metcalf draws attention to these 'sociological gaps which the long emphasis on Muslim cultural symbols had obscured' and argues that the social stresses of daily life exert far more influence on 'Muslim behaviour in India than any suspected militancy'.

From Pakistan, however, as more than 60 years of sovereign statehood might lead one to speculate, the evidence provided by Riaz Hassan and Matthew J. Nelson suggests different trends. States take pains to tell their stories to their citizens—indeed, to inculcate state-approved stories of *nationhood*. Pakistan is no different, though perhaps it has had a more difficult story to tell convincingly. The overwhelming reason for the existence of Pakistan has been to provide a place of safety and spiritual comfort for Muslims. But often for Pakistanis the question has arisen: what sort of Muslims?

Hassan's research on religious consciousness in Pakistan points to the importance of heavy state investment during the 10-year rule of General Zia ul-Haq. This was 'the Islamization programme', which 'claimed to manifest a universal Islamic vision, but in reality ... was based on a narrow interpretation of Islamic theology and law'. The number of students studying in *madrasas* quadrupled to more than 550,000 in about 20 years. State encouragement greatly expanded the cadre of teachers espousing a single, narrow version of the faith, a **(p.xxiii)** version in keeping with the doctrines of Afghani whose contests with Sayyid Ahmad Khan Professor Masud introduces in Chapter 1. Using the results of surveys carried out at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Professor Hassan outlines the strength of what he terms 'Salafabist' beliefs among large sections of the population of Pakistan. 'Salafabism', he argues, involves an attitude towards Islamic texts 'that is literalist, anti-rational, and anti-interpretive'.

In his study of schooling in Pakistan, Dr Nelson elaborates on these arguments about state investment in education. He argues that the use of Islam to counter divisive characteristics among the people of a 'Muslim state in South Asia' predated General Zia ul-Haq by a generation. As early as the 1940s, proponents of Pakistan aimed to paper over differences of language, geography, and local custom with the great story of a single faith, now about to rise proudly after a century of decline and humiliation. This new state was, in the eyes of its proponents, to be Pakistan. The research of Nelson and his associates reveals how ideas about behaviour and religious practice spread through society. Although fewer than 2 per cent of Pakistani children *live* in a madrasa as full-time students, probably 70 per cent of children study part-time in madrasas. Well-funded madrasas espousing common doctrines have given wide currency to those doctrines across Pakistan. Dr Nelson's research suggests that a government-school education does not necessarily lead to a more accepting attitude towards diversity in Islam in Pakistan.

One facet of this book tells a story of varied South Asian versions of Islam colliding with the colonial state in the nineteenth century. In this sense, the book is deficient: it lacks chapters dealing with two of the vivid threads of Islam—the Sufi and the Shia (though we examine experience of Ismailis in the chapters by Arif A. Jamal and Salim Lakha). In this, it perhaps reflects the steady ascendancy in South Asia since the 1970s of the 'Salafabist' tendency that Hassan writes of. Yet Shias make up 10–15 per cent of the Muslim populations of both India and Pakistan—perhaps 50 million people in all, and the city of Lucknow was once known as 'the Realm of the Shia'.⁷ Similarly, Sufism—an ecstatic, mystical path to God—provided **(p.xxiv)** everyday meaning to millions 'an easier path of devotion, mediation and guidance in the sometimes arid landscape of mandatory Muslim beliefs and observances'.⁸ To be sure, mainstream ulama, like Maulana Madani drew on Sufi traditions and participated in the deep relationships between holy man and disciple. Better understanding of how both Shia and Sufi

beliefs and practices make their way in contemporary South Asia is a task that we have evaded but one which warrants exploration.

Of the different prescriptions offered for Islam in South Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, two versions had profound effects. The first was the text-based, no-room-for-interpretation, no-place-for-metaphor, version of Afghani. The other was the political kingdom sought by Muhammad Ali Jinnah which led to Pakistan, a sovereign state whose creation set South Asia on a road from which there was no going back. Beds were made that had to be lain in.

For the large Muslim population remaining in India, debate over ways to lead a good life and how to advance the cause of Muslims and Islam continued into the twenty-first century. In Pakistan, there were pressures from the beginning, as Nelson argues, for the state to support a variety of Islam largely in the spirit of the Afghani tradition. The rule of General Zia strengthened this tendency, along with funds emanating from a sympathetic and oil-rich Saudi Arabia. Debate about 'what it is to be Muslim' was pushed into the background in twenty-first-century Pakistan; 'difference' was to be denied. Nelson's research concludes that rejection of different ways of being Muslim *increased* with the income of the person interviewed. Middle classes appeared to be less open to variation than the poor.

(p.xxv) Nelson's research into madrasa education in Pakistan presents an opportunity for revealing comparisons and contrasts with Tabereh Ahmed Neyazi's study of the educational activities of the Darul Uloom organization in Deoband in India. As with Nelson's research, Neyazi finds that 'more students from middle-class backgrounds are now coming to study in the seminary', an indication of 'the continued relevance of religious education even among the affluent section of the Indian Muslim community'. But Darul Uloom in Deoband, though often regarded as a bastion of conservative ideas and behaviour, has, Neyazi writes, 'repeatedly shown its progressive stance on various social issues', and it maintains a lively website 'in four languages: Arabic, English, Hindi, and Urdu'. Comparing the Darul Uloom experience of the past 40 years with developments in Pakistan, Dr Neyazi argues that 'the radicalization of certain madrasas in Pakistan has little to do with any inner logic of the madrasa system'. From this, one may suggest that religious institutions, even those with long-standing reputations for particular views and behaviours, respond to the incentives provided by the states in which they are located. In India's Kerala state, the website of the Indian Union Muslim League, a powerful political party with two dozen members of the state assembly, carries the pictures of five Muslim legislators and Mahatma Gandhi on its home page. Gandhi's picture carries the caption, 'Father of the Nation'.⁹ The incentives and directives in Pakistan led in different directions from those in India.

Tanweer Fazal elaborates on this theme of diverse influences, interpretations, and practices. Surveys of Muslim opinion in north India suggest, he argues, that Indian Muslims suffer from 'persistent stigmatization' to which they respond with 'aggressiveness, even brashness, rather than meekness'. But he also notes the class and status divisions among Muslims in India, which 'challenges the myth of egalitarianism and lays stress on caste as the constitutive unit of Muslim social structure'. He makes the point that 'the formulations of Muslim-ness, ... though largely drawn from a common repertoire of symbols, are ascribed multiple meanings'. His research suggests that ideas about what it is to be Muslim in India in the twenty-first century are open to contest and debate.

(p.xxvi) The experience of Muslims in what was once eastern Bengal—then East Pakistan and today Bangladesh—underlines the choices forced upon people in a 'modern' world of bureaucratic governments and nation states. Samia Huq and Mubashar Hasan analyse the attempts of Muslims in Bangladesh to find satisfying and rewarding ways of living as both Bengalis, deeply committed to a language and culture, and as Muslims, keenly devoted to a powerful religious tradition. Hasan focuses on the concept of ummah—the idea of the community of Muslim people all over the world—and explains how the idea 'has a serious political relevance in Bangladesh'. Because the idea of ummah is so well understood, and because Bengali cultural identity is also (equally?) powerful, Muslims in Bengal struggle to answer the question, 'Is my first allegiance to my faith or my culture?' For the current generation, these questions have new urgency and dynamics. The potency of the Internet affords lightning-fast avenues for exchange of ideas and resources. Advocates of different political cults of Islamism and exclusive views of the ummah are able to support followers around the world, not least in Bangladesh. Thus, as Hasan writes, in February 2013 'the contested relationship between Bangladeshi nationality and the ummah' was 'vividly illustrated by the burning of national flags [in Dhaka] over perceived humiliation to Islam'. And that flag burning in turn led to widespread counterdemonstrations to celebrate a Bangladeshi nation.

Drawing on research among study groups of religious Bangladeshi women, Huq approaches the same question from a different direction. The women she encountered did not conform to long-held stereotypes. They searched for ways to live as good Muslims, but they were not prepared simply to accept family practices or the pronouncements of religious leaders. Rather, it was 'reading and understanding for oneself which [drew] many women to the discussion circles'. Most of these women looked for middle ways—'the softer approach'—that allowed people to live as Muslims in various ways and even to accept that some people might choose not to be Muslims. However, the women often found themselves forced to confront the 'Muslim or Bangladeshi?' tension. Huq reiterates that Bengali Islam has confronted such problems for at least a hundred years. She suggests that the work of a Bengali writer of the mid-twentieth century, Allama Abul Hashim, may offer ways to think through some of

the dilemmas experienced **(p.xxvii)** by the women as they frame themselves as devout Muslims and Bangladesh as a productive nation with a Muslim majority. Although Hashim at one point in the 1960s worked with the Ayub Khan government of united Pakistan, he expounded 'an interpretive approach that professed "faith as an outcome of critical inquiry rather than as a precondition for it'. Given the women's desire to engage with Islam anew, and look ahead to progress, such a critical approach might, Huq reasons, provide scope for Muslims in Bangladesh to develop their own persuasive interpretation of how one can be both Muslim and Bangladeshi.

This book also focuses on aspects of everyday life among Muslims of South Asia. It was our intention, on the whole, to avoid 'the t-word'—to recognize the fact that for most Muslims 'terrorism' is not a preoccupation. Nevertheless, in the media and in the attitudes of the state, violence touches South Asian Muslims and affects their lives. Irfan Ahmad writes an impassioned critique of the Indian state and media and their conduct towards Muslims. 'It is well known,' he writes, 'that the police are biased against Muslims,' while the media, 'uninterested in reporting "facts" and alternative views', present a distorted 'mediatized world of terrorism'. In short, Indian Muslims continually contend with an antagonistic state and media. What of media in Pakistan? There, too, some citizens face danger and harassment. The veteran journalist Khaled Ahmed, a long-time columnist and analyst of the Urdu and English media in Pakistan, points to the difference between Urdu and English outlets. 'What can be printed in English without fear of adverse reaction from the state agencies cannot be printed in an Urdu publication.' Because of the dangers, there arose 'the tendency of a number of media workers, already Islamist in their outlook, to give their assent to the world view of al-Qaeda and the intelligence agencies'. As our two contributors see it, in neither Pakistan nor India does the state create conditions for free, truth-seeking media to flourish, and in both countries, media, in their treatment of key issues relating to Muslims, are deeply flawed.

The theme of diversity runs through this book. The Muslim world shares impressive common and sacred features—the call to prayer, the simplicity of the interiors of mosques, the adherence to the five pillars. But *externally* a mosque can be built in various ways—from the Shat Gambuj mosque and its 60 domes in Bangladesh to the classic Jama **(p.xxviii)** Masjid in Delhi, or the pitched, tiled roofs of mosques in Kerala in India's south-west. Four chapters underline diversity of customs and experience. In making the case that Muslims of south India and Sri Lanka, numbering close to 30 million people, have received far less attention than their rich stories deserve, Torsten Tschacher explains how colonial bureaucracy created 'meaning that was never there in the first place' in relation to Muslim groups. He is careful to refer to 'Muslim societies' in the plural and explains the 'great degree of diversity within and between these societies'. He pinpoints a common trend: the pressures to assimilate 'diversity and difference' to models derived from elsewhere, whether from north India,

colonial bureaucrats, or west Asia. Today, the pressures of long-standing bureaucratic practice remain, but keener challenges to local practice come from the wealth and patronage of west Asia and the style of Islam generated there. Dennis B. McGilvray's enthralling chapter on matrilocal marriage among Muslims on the east coast of Sri Lanka underlines both the diversity of practice among Muslims and the pressure for homogenization around west-Asian models in the twenty-first century. McGilvray notes how language has changed since the 1970s and words like *tāli*, which would once have been used to describe the necklace tied at marriage, have now been abandoned 'to avoid any Hindu religious connotations'. However, though a number of such west-Asian practices have arrived on the east coast of Sri Lanka, much local variation remained in 2012.

The Khoja Ismailis, Shia followers of the Aga Khan, are another branch of global Islam. Their widespread networks and adaptability underline the diversity of traditions and experiences that South Asian Muslims may adhere to. Salim Lakha's family story takes readers from Gujarat to East Africa and the United Kingdom, North America, and Australia. The faith was Islam; the occupation was trade. Today, Ismailis are found on every continent and follow practices notably different from those in south India that Tschacher explains or from the Islam of Pakistani Punjab or north India. Arif A. Jamal clarifies how the accepted global leadership of the Aga Khan has enabled the creation of a global system of dispute resolution that transcends state boundaries yet accommodates itself to national laws.

In a book purporting to focus on everyday life, recreation finds a place in Ronojoy Sen's exploration of Mohammedan Sporting Club of (p.xxix) Calcutta (now Kolkata), the football (soccer) team founded in 1891. The club's history mirrored, and occasionally influenced, the politics and social changes of South Asia. In the 1930s, it scouted the best football talent from Muslims across the Indian subcontinent and had a phenomenally successful run on the football pitch. Even as the club acquired an all-India following it became a focus for Muslim pride and a symbol of communal tendencies, at least in the eyes of Congress nationalists. After 1947, the club remained a Kolkata institution but the ties between the club and Muslim identity have weakened considerably.

This book, we hope, contributes to the rich, recent scholarship on contemporary Islam in South Asia, some of whose authors are represented here.¹⁰ What may readers expect to take from this book? First, an understanding of the controversies of the past 150 years over how South Asian Muslims should respond to the challenges of modernity and Western imperialism. Though such contests of ideas began with a few intellectuals, their consequences flowed through to touch the lives of ordinary people with the creation of Pakistan and the enriching of Wahhabi zealots through the oil wealth of west Asia since the 1970s. Second, readers will acquire a feel for processes, in train since British

times, that have created large social categories out of diverse, dispersed communities that once shared only a common devotion, a sacred book, and the duties the book enshrined. Modernity promotes mass production and recognizable categories, whether in census reports, social organization, or fast-food restaurants. Third, readers will encounter the diversity of peoples and practices among South (p.xxx) Asians who follow Islam. And with this, readers will learn something of those practices, whether in the resolution of disputes, the education of children, the marriage of offspring, or the recreations of leisure time. This book does not underplay the violence, oppression, and uncertainty that Muslims of South Asia too often face. The chapters written by Irfan Ahmad and Khaled Ahmed focus on these sombre aspects. At the same time, however, the book invites readers to contemplate the diverse daily lives of the more than 500 million people who are Muslims in South Asia.

Notes:

(¹) Stephen Frederic Dale. 1980. *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Māppilas of Malabar, 1498-1922*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 12-14.

(²) For a concise overview, see John F. Richards. 1993. *The Mughal Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(³) Francis Robinson. 1999. 'Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800', *South Asia*, 22(Supp. 1): 13-27, quoted on pp. 14-15.

(⁴) Pankaj Mishra. 2012. *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia*. London: Allen Lane, pp. 49-123.

(⁵) Attia Hosain. 1979. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, p. 289.

(⁶) Yagnesh Mehta. 2012. 'Maulana Ghulam Mohammed Vastanvi Changes Tone, Bats for Congress', *Times of India*, 22 October, available online at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-10-22/ahmedabad/34653165_1_vastanvi-jamia-islamia-ishaatul-uloom-modi-s-sadbhavana (accessed on 26 February 2013).

(⁷) J.R.I. Cole. 2003. 'Popular Shi'ism', in Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, pp. 311-40, see p. 312. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

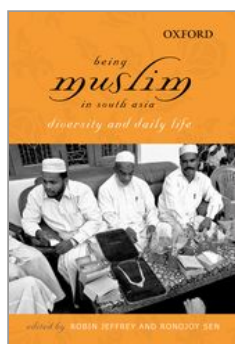
(⁸) Simon Digby, 'The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India', in *India's Islamic Traditions*, pp. 342-62, see p. 237. For glimpses of Sufism in contemporary India, see the video clip made at the dargah of Nizamuddin in Delhi in 2011, 'Vishwaas Ki Goonj: The Echo of Faith (with English subtitles)', available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7_IvAkL7UI (accessed on 26 February 2013) and the report by Rakhi Chakrabarty. 2011. 'Sufis Strike

Back', *Times of India*, 4 December, available online at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-12-04/special-report/30474274_1_sufism-wahabism-sufi-shrines (accessed on 26 February 2013).

(⁹) See <http://iuml.com/> (accessed on 10 March 2013).

(¹⁰) For example, Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds). 2012. *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation*. New York: Columbia University Press; Barbara Metcalf (ed.). 2006. *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Riaz Hassan. 2008. *Inside Muslim Minds*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; Naveeda Khan. 2012. *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan*. Durham: Duke University Press; Matthew J. Nelson. 2011. *In the Shadow of Shari'ah: Islam, Islamic Law, and Democracy in Pakistan*. London: C. Hurst and Co.; Irfan Ahmad. 2009. *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; James Gelvin and Nile Green (eds). Forthcoming. *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print, 1850-1930*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Islam and Modernity in South Asia

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Abstract and Keywords

The prevailing grand narrative of Islam and modernity overlooks the phenomenon of non-Western modernity. It refuses to recognize continuing trends of reconciliations, self-criticism, and accommodation in Muslim thought, especially in South Asia. This chapter sets out to remedy some of these misunderstandings. From 1857 when the Raj introduced its 'modernity project' in India, the narrative of modernity changed. Hindu and Muslim civilizations were presented as indulging in casuistry, mythologies, and treacherous political ideas. Muslims were divided into puritan and nominal. The modernity project aimed at civilizing the natives. The 'Western impact' defined modernity as Westernism. It generated among Indian Muslims a cultural resistance to modernity. Religious groups began organizing themselves into political parties that stood for conservatism that was justified as denunciation of colonialism and imperialism. Eventually this conflict led to fundamentalist and extremist religious trends in the twentieth century.

Keywords: modernity, religious reform, fundamentalism, self-criticism, Islam, Jamaluddin Afghani, Syed Ahmed Khan

Most Muslims conceive modernity, modernism, and modernization not only as Western and alien but also as hostile and threatening because modernity came to the Muslim world in the wake of colonialism. Muslims in South Asia experienced the liberating as well as the cruel, humiliating, and violent processes of modernity. Western colonial ideologues developed a narrative of modernity based on Western superiority that disparaged local religions and cultures. Muslim responses to Western modernity were therefore quite diverse,

ranging from accommodation and adjustment with the colonial rule to struggle for the restoration of Muslim political power and the caliphate, from social reforms to call for revival, and from total rejection of either tradition or modernity to a reconstruction of Islamic religious thought. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d.1898), **(p.2)** popularly known as Sir Syed, was arguably the first Muslim to realize in the 1870s the need for developing a new Islamic theology to respond to the challenges of modernity. Contrary to most of his contemporary Muslim thinkers who viewed it in political terms, Sir Syed conceived modernity in terms of conflict between science and religion, and regarded it as an intellectual and epistemological, rather than a political, challenge.

Sir Syed founded a scientific society in 1867 to translate books on sciences from Arabic into English and works on modern science into Urdu. A visit to Britain in 1869 left him greatly impressed by English culture and educational institutions. He launched a journal on moral reform (*Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*) in 1870 in which he developed a modern style of writing in plain and simple Urdu rather than the ornate style of the time. Consequently, his discourses on moral issues in Muslim society became accessible to an ordinary person. He founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh in 1875, India's first Muslim university, which intended to educate a new class of modern Indian Muslim gentlemen. His services in this respect are often compared with Raja Ram Mohan Roy who is regarded founder of modernism among the Hindus.¹

Sir Syed responded to almost all challenges of modernity and sought reforms in education, religious thought including theology and jurisprudence, historiography, political thought, language, and literature. He believed that religious thought in general faced epistemological crises. It was especially true about Muslim thinking because '*ilm al-kalam* or Muslim theology was not simply about Muslim beliefs but it had also developed into an epistemological framework that defined knowledge and controlled intellectual process. He called for new theology to respond to the challenges of science, stressed writing natural and plain language for better communication, and insisted on loyalty to the British rather than to the Ottomans.

Sir Syed believed that not only Muslims, but all believers in scriptures were challenged by science. He began developing new principles of interpreting scriptures in the 1860s and wrote the *Mohammedan* **(p.3)** *Commentary of the Holy Bible* in 1862. He proposed these principles, *Tahrir fi usul al-Tafsir* (Principles of Quranic exegesis) published in 1892, as new Islamic theology.² To him science meant studying laws of nature, which he called work of God and the scriptures were word of God: coming from the same source they could not be contradictory. Epistemological crisis arose from adhering to old theology that was informed by old Greek logic, philosophy, and metaphysics and from hermeneutics of literal interpretation. Islamic theology, '*ilm al-kalam*, that

informed Islamic epistemology was founded on Greek sciences: logic, metaphysics, and rhetoric.

He rejected the supernatural character of miracles and explained that the earlier scholars considered them miracles because 'the natural sciences had not progressed, and there was nothing to draw their attention to the law of nature and to make them aware of their mistakes'.³ Accordingly, if the context of a verse requires a second meaning, or if the words are used as a metaphor, interpretation cannot be restricted to its literal meaning. Sir Syed held that miracles might be extraordinary but they were not supernatural: first, because the Quran declares clearly that divine laws do not change; second, discoveries of modern science demonstrate that these events are not supernatural. Sir Syed was not a scientist himself; he relied on contemporary theories of nature. For him these laws constituted the criterion of rationality which was his primary concern. On account of his stress on natural laws and nature he was called a naturist. Addressing a gathering of Muslims in Lahore in 1884, he said, 'Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology (*jadid 'ilm al-kalam*) whereby we should either refute doctrines of modern sciences, or undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with Islam.'⁴ He said that the old theology founded on Greek (p.4) metaphysics was insufficient to comprehend new sciences that relied on experimentation and observation.⁵

Shibli Nu'mani (d.1914), a close associate of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and several traditional ulama rejected the need for a new theology because for them the ancient theology was scientific enough to dispel doubts created by modern science. His views on miracles attracted the ulama's most bitter criticism. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (d.1943) issued a long fatwa in 1886 declaring him a heretic (*mubtadi*) and his associates a 'new naturist sect' (*firqa muhditha nechariyya*).⁶ Maulana Qasim Nanautavi (d.1879) wrote the *Assessment of Religious Tenets* in 1890 refuting Sir Syed's principles of interpretation.⁷

Among those who challenged Sir Syed, Jamaluddin Afghani (d.1897) has been more detrimental. He was detained in Hyderabad, India, from 1879 to 1883, for his political activities against the British. Afghani wrote a fatwa declaring Sir Syed a heretic. Quite clearly, he had not read what Sir Syed had written; he relied on what the ulama told him. Written on the request of a certain Muhammad Wasil, a teacher in the Madrasa A'izza, Hyderabad Afghani's fatwa condemned Sir Syed as 'a collaborator, who threw off his religion, converted to Christianity, and claimed that all the prophets were Necharis and did not believe in God'.⁸ The fatwa was published first in Persian in 1881 in Hyderabad, then in Urdu in 1884 in Calcutta,⁹ and in Arabic in 1885 in Beirut. An Arabic translation by Afghani's disciple Mufti Muhammad Abduh (d.1905) had a more threatening title: 'A Treatise in Refutation of the Materialist Sect, an Account of their Evils and the Proof that Religion is the Basis of Civility and Disbelief destroys Society', shortened in (p.5) later editions to *al-Radd 'ala al-dahriyyin* (Beirut 1885). The

fatwa widely influenced Arab and European scholars (for example, Gibb)¹⁰ who did not have access to Sir Syed's original writings.

In their responses to modernity Sir Syed and Jamaluddin Afghani chose two different paths. Sir Syed called for intellectual development and Afghani stood for the restoration of the caliphate. For Sir Syed the challenge of modernity came from modern natural science; for Afghani, Western imperialism was the challenge. However, Sir Syed and his contribution to modernity remain marginal when compared to that of Afghani, whose ideas appealed directly to Muslim pride. I can think of two reasons for Afghani's charisma. First, because the majority of Muslims believed that the cause of Muslim backwardness and subjugation was political and, therefore, Muslim response to modernity rested on regaining political power. Second, due to an exclusive focus on the Arab Middle East, most historians of modernity regard Jamaluddin Afghani and his disciple Mufti Muhammad Abduh as founders of modernism in Islamic thought. These days Sir Syed's name also appears next to them. The point I want to stress is that choosing Afghani over Sir Syed deeply impacted the later development of Muslim societies. I will come back to this point later but let me explain how focusing on the Arab Middle East, and ignoring the South Asian contribution to modernity, has provided a lopsided picture of Muslim responses to modernity.

Most studies of Islam and modernity date the first Muslim encounter with modernity in 1798 when Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Egypt. They overlook several reform movements within the Muslim societies that according to Francis Robinson coincided with European presence and preceded Western impact.¹¹ Napoleon's expedition has been focused on for two reasons: evidence of European military superiority, and Muslim exposure to European Enlightenment and modernization.¹² But the Egyptian expedition was not the first Muslim **(p.6)** encounter with European modernity, and it was certainly not true for South Asia.

Long before the Egyptian expedition, Muslims had experienced British military superiority when Mughal forces under Nawab Sirajuddaulah were defeated in the battle of Plassey in Bengal in 1757. As a consequence several local rulers in south Asia began employing European instructors to train their armies. The kingdom of Mysore in India employed French military instructors and technicians and improved its army to the level that Fateh Ali Tipu, the Sultan of Mysore, established an alliance with the French and remained the main strategic target of continuous British attacks. According to some historians Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt was in fact intended to strengthen 'Tippoo sahib' (Tipu Sultan) against the British.¹³ That is why when Tipu Sultan fell in the battle of Seringapatam in 1799 victory was proudly celebrated in England.

Regarding the second reason, modernization, one may recall that soon after the battle of Plassey in 1757 a very complex administrative system started to evolve in South Asia. The East India Company claimed legal authority on behalf of both the Mughal emperor and the king of England. It administered and codified Hindu, Mohammedan, and English law, and statecraft and legal and judicial systems began to be transformed with the Regulating Act in 1773. This synthesis between Hanafi and English law produced the hybrid legal system called Anglo-Mohammedan law. The British colonial reforms introduced the version of Anglo-Mohammedan law later in Egypt, East Africa, and Nigeria, where Shafi'i and Maliki schools of law had prevailed. The narrative of Napoleon's expedition also tells the story of the first Muslim encounter with the printing press. In India, the printing press was introduced by Portuguese missionaries in the seventeenth century. The first printing press in Bombay started working in 1674, and the East India Company began using it for official business in 1761. Ghaziuddin Haider (d.1827), the ruler of Oudh, established Matba' Sultani, an official press, in 1818.¹⁴ Modernization in Egypt in fact began in 1830, much later than in South Asia.

(p.7) I dwelt on this detail to underscore the fact that the story of modernity in the Muslim world is incomplete without the South Asian part. Overlooking the relations between Napoleon and Tipu Sultan one tends to simplify the French expedition as a project of the French Enlightenment and supremacy. It is important to mention that Europeans in the eighteenth century were not obsessed with Western superiority over others; at least they were not hostile to Islam. Napoleon frequently referred to Islam, Islamic beliefs, the Quran, and its laws with respect and admiration and even used traditional Muslim invocations in his proclamations.¹⁵ In a letter to a Shaykh in 1798, Napoleon wrote, 'I hope the time is not far off when I shall be able to unite all the wise and educated men of all the countries and establish a uniform regime based on the principles of the Quran which alone are true and which alone can lead men to happiness.'¹⁶ This recurrent admiration of Islam puzzles historians until today. Most dismiss it as French political propaganda while some faithful are convinced that Napoleon had converted to Islam.

Admiration of Islam does not necessarily mean conversion or a ploy. It could be a genuine interest in another religion or culture. These statements are not odd in the historical context of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment because a number of European writers and thinkers praised Islam as a tolerant and rational civilization in order to criticize the Christian religious establishment.¹⁷ In India also we find examples of European fascination with Islam, Hinduism, Urdu, and Sanskrit. Percival Spear's *The Nabobs*¹⁸ and William Dalrymple's *White Mughals*¹⁹ portray how the English eagerly adopted local ways **(p.8)** of life. We can appreciate Napoleon's apparent admiration of Islam if we have the South Asian experience in mind. Albert Hourani, who considered the eighteenth century as the 'Indian century'²⁰ explains Napoleon's interest in Islam in the

following words: 'As a child of French Enlightenment, Bonaparte may well have regarded Islam as being nearer to the religion of reason than was Christianity, and until the end of his life he kept his lively interest in it.'²¹

Besides fascination, early European rulers also considered local knowledge and institutions an administrative, legal, and political necessity. Warren Hastings (d. 1818), the first Governor General of India from 1773 to 1785 assumed the role of Diwan, retained Persian as the administrative language, and chose to be called 'the Nawab Governor General' to 'legitimize British power through the forms and titles of Mughal authority'.²² In that position, he had the authority also to administer criminal laws in accordance with the Hanafi doctrine of *siyasa*²³ that recognized a ruler's discretionary prerogative in defining punishments and in restricting the jurisdiction of the judges. Hastings regarded the Quran as a source of Muslim law and invoked the doctrine of *siyasa* (spelled *siyasut*) for justifying state legislation. These measures had a lasting impact on the development of Islamic law in South Asia, at least in its life as Anglo-Mohammedan law.

It is due to this exclusive focus on the Arab Middle East that until recently almost all writers on modern Islam had credited Jamaluddin Afghani and Muhammad Abduh as the founders of modernism in Islam. Sir Syed was usually mentioned next to them. As a matter of fact, writings by Afghani and Abduh on the subject of science and religion appeared in 1881-2, almost 20 years after Sir Syed wrote on the subject in 1862. Sir Syed was more scientific and rational in his views, yet his contribution remains largely unappreciated. Let me explore the reasons for this rejection.

(p.9) Apparently Muslims saw modernity in terms of superior military capacity and victory in war, but the challenge came from science and technology which provided the material edge and advantage. Religious thought dismissed science, because it contradicted the scriptures, especially with reference to miracles and extraordinary events that could not be explained according to 'new' scientific rationality. A number of Western writers argued that Islam as a religion was responsible for Muslim backwardness. Afghani and Abduh wrote respectively in response to critiques of Islam by Ernest Renan (d.1892) and Gabriel Hanotaux (d.1944). Renan argued that Islam was opposed to reason and science,²⁴ and Hanotaux held Islam responsible for tyranny, irrationality, and backwardness among Muslims. Afghani retorted that Christians had been more hostile to Greek sciences than Muslims; they learnt Greek sciences from Muslims. In Afghani's words, 'The Europeans welcomed Aristotle, who had emigrated and become Arab; but they did not think of him at all when he was Greek and their neighbour.'²⁵

Abduh argued that whereas religious authority in Christianity was founded on opposition to reason, the tenets of Islam were based on reason.²⁶ Afghani criticized Darwin for degrading humanity. Humanity had reached maturity and prophesy ended with Muhammad. Thus, reason and revelation came together in the Quran for the first time in human history. He defined Islamic theology as a science that plays the same role in religious sciences as logic does in rational sciences. Abduh held that the laws of nature are unchangeable²⁷ and admired natural sciences, but he was not in favour of interpreting the Quran in their light. He argued that miracles are supernatural but not **(p.10)** impossible because God creates the laws of nature and he can cause them to deviate from the routine when he wishes.²⁸ To sum up, Abduh remained close to Muslim orthodox theology whereas Sir Syed was critical of Muslim theology.

It was in this environment that *al-Risala al-Hamidiyya*, published in 1889 by the Syrian scholar Shaykh Husayn Afandi al-Jisr (d.1909), became a popular text throughout the Muslim world. He justified miracles in modern scientific language.²⁹ He also offered scientific justifications for Muslim practices including veiling (hijab), polygamy, and slavery³⁰ and refuted naturists as materialists (*dahriyyin*).³¹ The *Risala* was translated into several languages and promoted by Rashid Rida in Egypt, Midhat Pasha in Turkey, and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi in India as a scientific contribution. Its Urdu translation was published in 1897 with the title *Science and Islam* and a sub-title: *Jadid 'ilm al-kalam* (New theology), and recommended as a textbook in Islamic religious schools.³²

In my view, two reasons explain why Afghani, Abduh, and Jisr were admired, and Sir Syed's warning about an epistemological crisis and his call for new theology were dismissed. One has to do with the Muslim belief in the impeccability of their tradition, and the other has to do with their tendency to attribute all their weaknesses to Muslim political decline. The belief in the impeccability of their tradition led to the doctrine of *taqlid*, sufficiency of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. This belief was shaken by Wahhabism and other reformist movements in the eighteenth century but as movements for revival they did not develop new theology. The political decline thesis became more **(p.11)** popular with the movements for nationalism and independence. Not only national, but also religious identity was defined in political terms. The stress on reform and self-criticism in the writings of a number of Muslim thinkers in the eighteenth century was set aside. Scholars like Shah Waliullah (d.1762) who reviewed critically Muslim theology, jurisprudence, and history, offered a penetrating analysis of Mughal administration, fiscal practices, education, and society. He called for reforms in religious practices of *bid'at* and *taqlid*, emphasized *ijtihad* and return to the primary Islamic sources of the Quran and Hadith, but his advocacy was overshadowed by new political concerns.³³

Revisiting Sir Syed's call for new theology, Muhammad Iqbal (d.1938) observed that the 'concepts of theological systems, draped in the terminology of a practically dead metaphysics' could not help the reconstruction of religious thought, and remarked that 'the only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us'.³⁴ Iqbal thus endorsed Sayyid Ahmad Khan's call for a new theology by clearly rejecting ancient metaphysics as a dead science. He observed that modern man is accustomed to concrete thinking and regards inner experience as an illusion. He demands a scientific form of knowledge.

The political situation had changed during Iqbal's period. Muslims were engaged in nationalist movements for independence. Modernity in this era came to be objectified as autonomy of the self and an independent national identity. The political focus of the encounter made Jamaluddin Afghani a greater figure than Sir Syed even in Iqbal's poetry. Nevertheless, Iqbal continued Sir Syed's stress on the epistemological crisis in Muslim thought. He shifted the focus from new theology to new jurisprudence and from the mechanical scientific approach of the nineteenth century to a dynamic worldview of the twentieth century.

(p.12) Iqbal pleaded for the institutionalization of *ijtihad* and *ijma*, not only to make them more dynamic but also to institutionalize autonomy of the self. Iqbal suggested that a modern parliament could play this role. It was from this perspective that he welcomed the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate by Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish republican form of the caliphate, which transformed the caliphate from the authority of an individual to an institution of governance. For the Muslims in India, he also proposed a state or states which would be independent enough to remove the stamp of Arab imperialism on Islam.

Iqbal objectified modernity as an issue of autonomy of the self and called for empowering the self (*khudi*). His framework for the theology of modernity focused on the autonomy of self. This doctrine was contrary to the prevalent notion of elimination of human will and desire as expressions of the self, which was the core idea of pantheist Sufism prevalent in Indian Muslim communities. It could not gain popularity among the orthodox ulama, who found it in conflict with the idea of total surrender to God, even though almost all contemporary reform movements stressed the role of the individual in reform efforts. Iqbal's criticism of the West, admiration of the Muslim past, and call for Muslim unity were reminiscent of Afghani's views. They earned him more popularity than his ideas of self-autonomy and *ijtihad*.

After independence, Muslim discourse focused on two very complicated issues: Muslim identity and constitutions. Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (d.1979) developed the theology of the sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) of God and supremacy of sharia to

counter the idea of the modern conceptions of democracy, sovereignty of the people, parliament, and nation state. Gradually, however, the demand for implementation of sharia by the state let the concept of nation state take root in his political theology. Maududi equated modernity with secularism, which he translated as denial of religion (*la-diniyyat*). To him, the Islamic state was theocracy (*Ilahi Jamhuri hukumat*) as opposed to secular democracy (*la-dini jamhuriyyat*). Apparently Sayyid Maududi gave a new theology but it was in fact a restatement of the old theology in modern diction that added to, rather than reduced, Muslim frustrations. Blaming the West became the only way out.

Continuing from where Iqbal left, *Methodology in Islamic History* by Fazlur Rahman (d.1988), published in 1965, called for a new approach to Islam and modernity by historicizing Islamic law and legal theory. **(p.13)** The Quranic injunctions could be understood and extended to modern situations only by placing them in historical context. Rahman argued that although the impact of the West could not be denied, Islamic modernism could not be understood without placing it in continuity with the reform movements in the eighteenth century. For Rahman, separation between religion and politics is accidental because Islam is not yet truly the basis of the state in Muslim countries; Islam has been applied only to a narrow sphere like personal laws.³⁵

Rahman disagreed with those who considered secularism to be the ultimate phase of modernity. He explained that secularism in Muslim societies appears imminent due to the rigidity of the conservative ulama. He criticized the 'apologetic-controversial literature' that romanticized Islamic civilization and 'created a barrier against further modernist development'.³⁶ Fazlur Rahman predicted that 'sooner or later, but probably in the predictable future, Muslim countries would break up into racial and linguistic units on the pattern of Europe'.³⁷

During the last decade of the twentieth century, Sir Syed's movement for new theology appeared to have receded against the movements for Islamization. Islamic revolution in Iran, Islamization in Pakistan, Jihad, and the Islamic emirate in Afghanistan called for supremacy of sharia. These movements radicalized not only Muslim body politics, but they also called for authenticity. One of their significant products was Islamization of knowledge. 'Every discipline must be remoulded so as to reincorporate the relevance of Islam, along a triple axis constitutive of *tawhid*': three unities of knowledge, life, and history.³⁸ It called for re-establishment of various disciplines of human knowledge on Islamic foundations.³⁹ Critical studies of orientalism such as by Edward Said were used to critique Islamic modernism as **(p.14)** a product of orientalism. This new theology, essentially a political discourse,⁴⁰ failed as an academic project but it succeeded in marginalizing critical studies of Islam.

To conclude, let me reiterate the crucial point in this chapter, namely the role of grand narratives in oversimplifying otherwise complex historical phenomena. The history of South Asia has been written continually from the perspectives of grand narratives of empires, modernization, nationalism, freedom struggle, sovereignty, and development. Most of these narratives were constructed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries but each of them rewrote Islamic history, especially focusing on the early period. Theological narratives promoted Abduh, who did not see modernity as posing any challenge to Islam. Political narratives dismissed the eighteenth century as a period of decline and promoted Afghani as a Muslim hero who fought against Western imperialism. Developments in the nineteenth century further reinforced Afghani's position among Muslims in South Asia.

The Western grand narrative of modernity tells the story of enlightenment movements in the eighteenth century. Their impact on Asia and Africa marginalized the role of local reform movements. This grand narrative needs to be revisited because it does not explain why Afghani and other Islamic modernists are 'anti-West', and Sir Syed and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the fathers of modernism in India, are called 'pro-West'. The grand narrative also raises the question of why several reformist movements in South Asia are depicted as anti-modern. The grand narrative also does not explain why recent studies of modernity in South Asia tend to focus on the idea of multiple modernities, and Islamic modernism is underplayed against Islamism.

These grand narratives overlook the movements of reform and enlightenment in Asia and Africa in the eighteenth century, which were essentially against the rigidity of Muslim orthodoxy that led to sectarianism, ritualism, and superstition-spiritualism. In Africa, these movements became political and militant and established jihadi states. In India, the story was different probably because the Bhakti movement in sixteenth century had already paved the way for peaceful religious **(p.15)** reform. Indian eighteenth-century thinkers were self-critical and generally called for reconciliation and synthesis, but not syncretism. Shah Waliullah revisited Islamic traditions of law, Sufism, theology, and philosophy to reconcile the conflicting intellectual contestations. That explains why his son Shah Abdul Aziz (d.1823) is remembered by all the different Muslim denominations with respect. He witnessed the fall of Mughal Delhi and the advent of British colonialism, but was on friendly terms with the British. The early nineteenth century was a period of mutual admiration and understanding between the British and Indian Muslims and Hindus.

It was after 1857 that the British Raj introduced its 'modernity project' in India and the narrative of modernity changed. The British government declared Shah Abdul Aziz's fatwa as a flag of mutiny. Reformist movements were called Wahhabis and pan-Islamists. English began to replace Persian and Sanskrit. The history of India was retold as a story of decadence and civil strife. Hindu and

Muslim civilizations were presented as indulging in casuistry, mythologies, and treacherous political ideas. Muslims were divided into puritan and nominal. The modernity project aimed at civilizing the natives.

The situation changed in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Scientific discoveries stressed a dynamic rather than a mechanical view of the universe and nature. Movements for national identity popularized a rather hostile attitude to the West and Western modernity. Muslims began to conceive their political renaissance sometimes in terms of the ummah and universal caliphate. These movements shifted the emphasis of Islamic thought from the need for new theology to restoration of the caliphate.

The Ottoman caliphate was declining and several theories about its future were under discussion. It was in this context that a narrative of jihad against British imperialism appeared. It started with Shah Abdul Aziz's fatwa declaring India as *dar ul-harb*. Recent studies have concluded that neither Shah Abdul Aziz nor those who requested fatwas from him ever mentioned jihad.⁴¹ Rather, the fatwas explained whether Muslims living in India as *dar ul-harb* were allowed usurious transactions, slave trade, and employment in the British government. The ideas of nationalism and freedom struggle gave a new meaning to **(p.16)** the concept of *dar ul-harb*. Abul Kalam Azad (d.1958) wrote *Mas'ala khilafat* (The issue of the caliphate) in 1920 and launched a movement in India for the preservation of the Ottoman caliphate. He called for reforms in religious practices like considering visits to graves of saints obligatory under the local influence. He also condemned the doctrine of strict adherence to one school of Islamic law and emphasized judging legal matters on the basis of the teachings of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad, without being restricted by the doctrines of the jurists. His reform ideas were, however, overshadowed by new political concerns of resistance to colonial dominance.⁴² In this context Afghani's idea of a universal caliphate, or pan-Islamism as the British called it, revived Afghani's charisma, especially in South Asia. Among the admirers of Afghani, Iqbal publicly denounced the Khilafat movement.

In 1924 when Atatürk abolished the caliphate and large street demonstrations demanded its restoration, Muhammad Iqbal, in a lecture, welcomed the abolition as a transformation of the Ottoman caliphate into a republican government. While Turkey was moving towards a constitutional republic, European statesmen were considering maintaining the caliph as a spiritual head of the Muslims. Among the several candidates for that position, the names of King Fuwad of Egypt, Sharif of Mecca, Bay of Tunis, and Nizam of Hyderabad were prominent.

As I hinted earlier, the British and Muslim grand narratives reinforce their own respective perspectives on modernity. Muslim narratives justified the impeccability of their own theological tradition and focused instead on political power. As the term 'modernity' continuously acquired new meaning, the politics

of identity and new social formation also expanded the meaning of the term 'political'. These new narratives dismissed Sir Syed's call for new theology and scientific education as well as his stress on clear and plain methods of mass communication. His movement for a modern style of writing in plain Urdu was set aside by the revival of heavily Arabized and Persianated Urdu. His colleagues, like Altaf Husayn Hali (d. 1914), promoted a natural style of poetry on popular themes. This movement did not survive as Shibli Nu'mani, Abul Kalam Azad, Sayyid (p.17) Sulayman Nadwi, and Muhammad Iqbal revived the old ornate style of writing. This rejection reinforced not only the belief in the sufficiency of old theology and Urdu culture but also the total disregard for the epistemological crisis that Muslim thought has been facing, and has today brought Muslims to an intellectual impasse. I can perhaps also extend this conclusion to other Muslim societies where power politics attracted more attention than intellectual development. Consequently, Jamaluddin Afghani's political ideology of a universal caliphate dominated Muslim imaginations. Neglecting religious reforms and education, Muslim thought in South Asia came to its present intellectual impasse.

Notes:

(¹) Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.). 2000. *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighī Jamā'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. xliii.

(²) Sayyid Ahmad Khan. 1970. 'Principles of Exegesis: English translation of Tahrir fi usul al-Tafsir', in Aziz Ahmad (ed.) (trans. Muhammad Daud Rahbar), *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, pp. 25-42.

(³) Khan, 'Principles of Exegesis', p. 35.

(⁴) Christian W. Troll. 1978. *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, p. 311. For the English translation of the lecture, see Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, pp. 307-32.

(⁵) Fazlur Rahman. 1979 [1966]. *Islam*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 217. See also J.M.S. Baljon. 2003. 'Ahmad Khan', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 1. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 287.

(⁶) Ashraf Ali Thanawi. 1992. *Imdadul Fatawa*, vol. 6. Karachi: Darul Isha'at, pp. 165-85.

(⁷) Aziz Ahmad. 1970. *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 60-76.

(⁸) Jamaluddin Afghani. 1884. 'The Materialists in India', *Al-Urwatul Wuthqa*, 28 (August).

- (⁹) Zahid Chaudhari. 1999. *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*. Lahore: Idara Mutal'at, p. 216.
- (¹⁰) H.A.R. Gibb. 1945. *Modern Trends in Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 58.
- (¹¹) Francis Robinson. 2008. 'Islamic Reform and Modernities in South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 42(2-3): 259-81.
- (¹²) Eugene Rogan. 2009. *The Arabs: A History*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 81-6.
- (¹³) William E. Watson. 2003. *Tricolor and Crescent: France and the Islamic World*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, p. 13.
- (¹⁴) Moinuddin Aqeel. 2009. 'Commencement of Printing in the Muslim World: A View of the Impact on *Ulama* at Early Phase of Islamic Moderate Trends', *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 2(2): 10-21.
- (¹⁵) Albert Hourani. 1970. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 49.
- (¹⁶) Christian Cherfils. 1914. *Bonaparte et l'Islam*. Paris: Pedon Edition, pp. 105, 125.
- (¹⁷) Muhammad Khalid Masud. 2003. 'Il Culto della Spagna nei paesi Musulmani d'area Mediterranea', in Valentina Colombo e Gustavo Gozzi (Eds.), *Tradizioni culturali, sistemi giuridici e dritti umani nell'area del Mediterraneo* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino), pp. 127-140, see p. 127.
- (¹⁸) Percival Spear. 1998 [1963]. *The Nabobs: A Study of Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- (¹⁹) William Dalrymple. 2003. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*. New York: Penguin.
- (²⁰) Cited in Barbara D. Metcalf. 1982. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 9.
- (²¹) Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 50.
- (²²) Scott Alan Kugle. 2001. 'Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 35(2): 257-313, see p. 262.
- (²³) Kugle, 'Framed, Blamed and Renamed', p. 264.

⁽²⁴⁾ Ernest Renan. 1968. *L'Islamisme et la Science* (Paris, 1883), 17, cited in Nikkie R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 85, n 59.

⁽²⁵⁾ Nikki R. Keddie. 1968. *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 185.

⁽²⁶⁾ Mufti Muhammad Abduh. 1897. *Al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyya ma'a al-'ilm wa'l madaniyya* (Islam and Christianity with Knowledge and Civility). Cairo: Al-Manar.

⁽²⁷⁾ Cited in Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 137.

⁽²⁸⁾ Mufti Muhammad Abduh. 1956 [1902]. *Risalat al-Tawhid* (Treatise on Unity). Cairo: Al-Mu'tamar al-Islami, pp. 80-1.

⁽²⁹⁾ Aziz Al-Azmeh. 1993. *Islams and Modernities*. New York: Verso, p. 120.

⁽³⁰⁾ Husayn Afandi al-Jisr. 1889. *Kitab al-Risala al-Hamidiyya fi haqiqat al-Diyanat al-Islamiyya wa haqiqat al-Shari'at al-Muhammadiyya*. Beirut: Majlis Ma'arif, pp. 113, 120.

⁽³¹⁾ al-Jisr, *Kitab al-Risala*, p. 138.

⁽³²⁾ 'Ali, Muhammad Ishaq. 1984. *Sa'ins awr Islam*, Urdu translation of al-Jisr, *al-Risala al-Hamidiyya* (The Book of Hamidiyya Treatise about the Authenticity of the Religion of Islam and the Authenticity of the Law of Muhammad). Lahore: Idara Islamiyyat.

⁽³³⁾ Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.). 2008. *Atharhwin sadi 'isawi men barri saghir men Islami fikr ke rahnuma* (Leading Thinkers of Muslim Thought in the Subcontinent in Eighteenth Century). Islamabad: Idara Tahqiqat Islami.

⁽³⁴⁾ Muhammad Iqbal. 1986 [1930]. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, p. 78.

⁽³⁵⁾ Fazlur Rahman. 1969. 'The Impact of Modernity on Islam', in Edward J. Jurji (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and World Community: Interfaith and Intellectual Communication*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 248-62, see p. 253.

⁽³⁶⁾ Rahman, 'Impact of Modernity', p. 252.

⁽³⁷⁾ Rahman, 'Impact of Modernity', p. 259.

⁽³⁸⁾ Isma'il Raji Faruqi. 1982. *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplans*. Islamabad: National Hijra Centenary Committee of Pakistan, ch. 'Preface'.

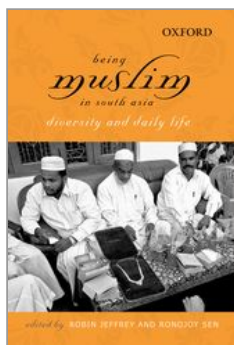
(³⁹) Faruqi. 1982. *Islamization of Knowledge*.

(⁴⁰) Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr. 1992. *Islamization of Knowledge: A Critical Review*. Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

(⁴¹) Masud, *Atharhwin sadi*.

(⁴²) Masud, *Atharhwin sadi*.

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Islam and Democracy in India

From Savile Row to Jyotiba Phule Park

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Abstract and Keywords

Whatever the inequities and corruption, India rightly stands out as the world's largest democracy. India also claims the world's largest minority, its 160 or 175 million Muslims constituting some 14 per cent of the whole and forming the third largest Muslim population in the entire world. Although pre-partition India gave birth to one of the most influential Islamist thinkers of the 20th century, India's Muslim leadership throughout has championed democracy and democratic participation—from the ideal liberal theory espoused by Jinnah and the communitarian democracy of *ulama* and others articulated at mid-twentieth century, to the Nehruvian secularism and class-based Muslim Dalit/disadvantaged activism in the present. This chapter traces the various idioms of democratic participation on the part of three seminal twentiethth century leaders (Jinnah, the Islamic scholar Madani, and the Islamist Maududi) to the proliferation of party loyalties and causes of Muslims in the present.

Keywords: Jinnah, secularism, assimilation, democracy, Muslim political thought

The eight countries of South Asia in recent decades have given us virtually every form of rule, from monarchy, to military authoritarianism, to rule by Islamists. Among them, India is the proud claimant to the title of the world's largest democracy—and the world's largest minority, some 160 or 175 million Muslims, roughly 14 per cent of a total population of 1.3 billion.¹ The number of Muslim Indians dwarfs **(p.19)** virtually all Muslim majority countries except for Indonesia and India's immediate neighbours to the north-west and north-east.

Even then, its Muslim population rivals Pakistan's and is larger than Bangladesh's. India's Muslims constitute a larger population than *all* the North African/Middle Eastern countries caught up in 'the Arab spring' and its unfolding since 2011. This is, moreover, a highly diverse population as the essays in this volume testify, speaking different languages, participating in multiple regional cultures, practising—or not practising—diverse religious styles, enjoying widely divergent economic and educational levels—and in this they are like their fellow citizens.

Muslim Indians in public life, from the beginning of mass politics in the 1920s until today, have advocated a democratic process in politics. Today, India's Muslim citizens are active participants in electoral politics. Indians in general vote at a very high percentage compared, for example, to the United States. In India, again in contrast to the United States, it is the poor, which includes most of India's Muslims, not the better off, who most actively exercise their franchise. Muslims vote; they lead parties; in some areas they can swing elections.² There is, however, no national Muslim party, nor any single Muslim 'vote bank', although parties are regularly accused of 'pandering' to such a bank. All this opens some opportunities for securing the interests of Muslim citizens.

Tipping the scales on the other side, however, Muslim political efforts have faced an uphill struggle, precisely because of yet another dimension of modern democratic states: the use of a population constituted as a problematic minority to serve as a foil for what is sometimes called 'majoritarian' nationalism. Muslim Indians were first **(p.20)** consigned this role in the nationalist movement when a historical narrative posited Turk and Afghan rulers as the foreigners responsible for Indian political and civilizational decline. This argument served both colonialist interests in justifying their own presence and nationalist narratives looking for an explanation for India's subservience. Anti-Muslim attitudes were further fuelled by India's partition at the time of independence in 1947 when areas of the country were cut off to form a Muslim-majority state. The substantial Muslim population that remained in India was subject to suspicion as always potentially subversive, presumed to be sympathetic to a country that had emerged as a foreign enemy: Irfan Ahmad's contribution to this volume (Chapter 14) addresses this kind of suspicion. In fact, India has been striking for the lack of home-grown Islamic militancy. Muslim Indians outside Kashmir, moreover—a huge subject in its own right—have even been scrupulously circumspect in relation to the tragic occupation and violations of human rights there.

For all these problems, India nonetheless stands, along with many other examples, as a country that gives the lie to the stereotype that Islam and democracy (or indeed Islam and capitalism) are incompatible. When the columnist Nicholas Kristof asked in relation to Muslim political experience 'Is Islam the Problem?', he touched on the long history of Muslim societies, the

experience of colonialism, and, indeed, Islamic teachings, to offer a pithy conclusion: 'Islam isn't the problem and it isn't the solution, it's simply a religion.'³ Even after the recent pro-democracy movements in the Middle East, a conclusion like this seems remarkable given the persistence of stereotypes about Islam. There have, of course, been influential Muslim **(p.21)** political figures in India as elsewhere who have insisted that there was an Islamic justification or even requirement for any number of governing patterns. And other Muslims who disagreed. Such invocation and disagreement underlines, in Kristof's phrase, that Islam is 'simply a religion' like any other.

However justified, a range of visions came into play for Muslims in the context of India's independence movement. There were, one might suggest, two models of democratic participation that have competed ever since. One model is of what might be called ideal liberal democracy, roughly characterized by such features as elected membership in institutions, separation of powers either institutionally or through federal arrangements, and crucially, *the existence of free citizens who stand in direct relation with the state*, with no ascriptive categories or institutions mediating their participation in governing institutions. This was the vision of the main architect of India's constitution, B.R. Ambedkar; of the great prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru; and, perhaps surprisingly, of the 'founding father' of the Muslim state of Pakistan, M.A. Jinnah.

The second model is rooted in what is sometimes called the 'colonial sociology' of India. This vision of India was predicated on the understanding that the nation was comprised of discrete and enduring 'communities' defined by caste, religion, and ethnicity. This understanding was central to the discourse of nationalist negotiations in the decades leading up to India's independence in 1947 as debates focused on 'the Hindu community', 'the Muslim community', and, at times, 'the untouchable community'. The contours of British governance had long construed Hindus and Muslims in particular as two static, parallel, and fundamentally opposed groups, each driven by their religion, whose interests could virtually never intersect. These identities were reflected in negotiations about provincial boundaries, participation in governing structures, and opportunities in educational institutions. As the British began to introduce limited representative government into India during the early twentieth century, they devised formalized quotas in the emergent representative institutions.

The remainder of this chapter turns to the political visions of four Muslim leaders of the twentieth century, assessing each in relation to these two models: the model of what might be called an ideal liberal democracy on the one hand, and a second one, a communitarian **(p.22)** model, positing enduring communities that constitute the nation that for some purposes are given legal standing on the part of the state.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Jinnah (1876–1948), the Westernized lawyer of the Muslim League, was in many ways typical of the nationalist leaders of the mid-twentieth century in being part of the legal profession, fluent in English, and of upper-class status. To be sure, he stood out for his meticulously tailored ‘bespoke’ Savile Row wardrobe—and an aversion to extra-legal demonstrations, the use of homespun khadi as a political symbol, and, generally, the tactics taken up under the leadership of Gandhi. He was a proponent of what was sketched out above as the model of ideal liberal democracy.⁴ Jinnah’s party, the Muslim League, took as a central goal devolution of power to the regional level, thus allowing **(p.23)** provinces with a largely Muslim population to conduct their political life, at least in internal affairs, without a focus on religion or other group identities—where, in short, they could ideally leave behind the colonial model of communitarian identities, and citizens could group and regroup as individuals with whatever interests seemed significant.⁵ Thus, to underline what was long the Muslim League goal: they wanted to create political contexts *where Muslims would cease to be defined politically as Muslims*. To achieve this, they favoured a decentralized federal arrangement. By the end of the colonial period, they focused on five of the existing provinces, which would have largely Muslim populations.⁶ Jinnah, one might argue, was using the communitarian model in order to transcend it. He invoked the distinctive characteristics of an imagined minority ‘Muslim community’ in order to secure political arrangements where they would not be one.

In 1940 the Muslim League, instead of advocating decentralized federalism, declared a separate state as their goal.⁷ But as late as 1946, their leadership accepted the plan for a loose federal system proposed by the so-called Cabinet Mission, sent out from Britain by the new Labour government at the end of World War II. For Nehru and other Congress leaders this kind of federal structure was unacceptable given their commitment to central state planning in the interest of economic growth. Partition seemed the only route to allowing that kind of government to develop.

Jinnah’s ‘bargaining chip’ turned into Pakistan (whose eastern wing in 1971 broke away to become Bangladesh). In a speech addressing Pakistan’s Constituent Assembly in 1947 he set out his vision for the new nation, a vision that could be said to have served at the time as equally the vision of an Ambedkar or a Nehru:

(p.24) Now, if we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people.... If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this State with equal rights,

privileges, and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make.... We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community ... will vanish.... You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed [-] *that has nothing to do with the business of the State.*⁸

Jinnah himself was known to be not particularly observant religiously, but personal beliefs were irrelevant to both his vision of the community, a matter of the happenstance of birth, and to that of the nation.

For Jinnah and influential figures like the poet Muhammad Iqbal, the symbol of Islam came to stand for a utopian vision of a new state freed of the old divisions that constrained any individual's political choices. Elsewhere in the speech quoted above, Jinnah specifically excoriated the ties of kin and of landlords who controlled their dependents, the backbone of the rival non-communal landed parties that successfully opposed Jinnah in Punjab and Bengal until the very end.⁹ In fact, those divisions organized the Pakistan movement when it took hold in the final years before partition; and such divisions continued to be central in Pakistan's political life. The tensions between **(p.25)** patronage, kin loyalties, and other ties, on the one hand, and a utopian ideal of free individuals symbolized by Islam, on the other, became central to Pakistan's public life.

Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani

A competing approach to political life that emerged in pre-independence India was characteristic of Muslim political leaders known as 'the nationalist ulama' and can be described in relation to a second major Muslim leader, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957).¹⁰ Not all Muslims associated with the Indian National Congress held to Madani's position, but his was an important voice as someone rooted in a major Islamic scholarly tradition who was also a central figure in a prestigious seminary. Madani shared Jinnah's commitment to protecting Muslim interests and to espousing secular democracy. But his was a different life trajectory and a different understanding of the appropriate form of democracy. At the time of World War I, Madani had got caught up, almost inadvertently, in a great anti-British conspiracy through ties to one of his old teachers from the Islamic seminary of Deoband in India. The participants hoped for Ottoman and Afghan assistance in mounting an attack on the British in India from the north-west. Madani wound up interned on the Mediterranean island of Malta, where he enjoyed a kind of school for anti-colonialism, as colonial prisons so often were, in company ranging from an alleged Bengali bomb-thrower to a Punjabi doctor to nationalist Turkish prisoners of war, and others. A changed man, Madani returned to India in 1919 in time for the beginning of the mass political movements that emerged at the end of the war. He soon became a

central leader in nationalist political life, an ardent supporter of Gandhi and non-cooperation, and, like other nationalist leaders, he was jailed several times.

Madani in some ways, ironically, was more in tune with the times than Jinnah. His nationalism was not only anti-colonial, as was Jinnah's; it was also profoundly territorial. Jinnah, the modernist, in **(p.26)** the end wound up as the proponent of a new nation that lacked the fundamental hallmark of the modern nation state, namely attachment to an enduring bounded territorial unit. For Madani, Jinnah just did not 'get it'. As talk of a separate state for Muslims began in the late 1930s, Madani's vision was clear: 'In the current age, nations are based on homelands, not religion.'¹¹ If you lived in India, you were an Indian, end of discussion. Madani also in this regard cultivated a kind of modern romantic nationalism, couched, as it always is, by projecting current identities into a timeless past. He celebrated the very land of India, giving an Islamic genealogy to its unparalleled flora and fauna, carried by Adam from Paradise, and sacred in its very soil because for centuries it had been the resting place of saints and prophets whose holy charisma radiates, he wrote, like radio waves, to the present. Madani also used this 'history' to turn anti-Muslim Hindutva or Hindu nationalist/chauvinist history on its head, by making Muslims—in the sense that Adam was the first Muslim—the very first inhabitants of India, hardly the invading 'foreigners' others held them out to be. Moreover, far from only cherishing sacred places outside India, a charge levelled against Muslims and Christians alike, Madani pointed out that not only had the tombs of the sainted dead made India's soil sacred, but the graves of ordinary Muslims meant that Muslim Indians had a far greater attachment to the land itself than did Hindus, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians (as he put it) given that members of these other communities 'are cremated and can be reincarnated anywhere'.¹²

Madani also provided a sacred analogue to support an undivided India by invocation of prophetic example: an episode in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the treaty of Hudaibiyah, when Muhammad allied with various non-Muslims, including Jews. In such a compact, Madani argued, a Muslim would side with non-Muslim compatriots even against a common Muslim foe.

(p.27) Madani also, arguably, was more attuned to realpolitik than Jinnah. Those who favoured partition, he argued, were essentially colonialist dupes. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the carving up of the Middle East into European protectorates was his case in point. To divide Hindus and Muslims, Madani asserted, was yet another colonial strategy to weaken, or make use of, formerly subject peoples. Given post-war geopolitics, starting with the Cold War, Madani's argument was in fact prescient. In practical terms, moreover, he knew that the dispersed and socially integrated Muslim community could never be geographically consolidated. Madani's opposition to the British

was not based on 'fanaticism', but on opposition to injustice and a grasp on realpolitik.

With a territorial, historicized, mythological vision of India so unlike Jinnah's, Madani's political vision for the independent state differed as well. Madani saw the colonialist sociological model of permanent communities not only as a *strategy* on the way to independence but as the long-term future of the country. Madani, a surprising fact, campaigned with Jinnah in a Muslim League–Congress alliance in the United Provinces as late as 1936. They shared, after all, the goals of anti-colonialism and securing Muslim interests. But by the 1930s Madani had come to see the language of the Indian National Congress, which was espousing what had become an international language of 'minority cultural rights', as central to his vision of a free India. His was close to Gandhi's, not Nehru's, vision of the 'multicultural' and secular state: a society in which religiously defined communities would continue to matter, each cultivating its own sacred traditions. For him, attention to the distinctive interests of those communities was not a challenge but an essential component to the strength of the shared national state. The Indian state would be secular, not as in the Jeffersonian ideal, by being cut off by a wall from religious interests, but rather a state that would favour no particular religion but engage in various ways to support all.

Evidence of the second model can be found in India's constitution. Even states, like India, that create constitutions or traditions based on liberal ideals may also allow for some kinds of formal deviations.¹³ The constitution, promulgated in 1950, defined some specific **(p.28)** 'communities', which for some purposes shaped their respective members' mode of interacting with institutions of the state. Thus, the Indian state identified the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities as having distinctive family or personal laws which were to be adjudicated in the context of the secular state courts; this was a continuation of an arrangement established in the colonial period. The constitution also defined Dalits (or former 'untouchables') and tribals as communities that had been subject to ritual discrimination and economic disadvantage, for whom 'reservations' of seats in political bodies, and affirmative action in state enterprises and educational institutions, would be provided. These were the 'scheduled castes' (untouchables) and 'scheduled tribes', or 'SCs' and 'STs', populations identified on a list or 'schedule' in the colonial period who were to be awarded compensatory discrimination. To be sure—and importantly—members of both the religious communities and the status groups were to relate to the state as individuals, albeit in relevant contexts explicitly as 'marked' individuals. The groups were not constituted as having legal power over individual members.

Reservations were intended to be short-lived, to simply give these populations an initial 'hand up'. In relation to religious communities, it is important to note, the constitution eschewed the divisive separate electorates of the colonial era.

The separate laws, like reservations, were seen as temporary, with the goal that once the minorities gained confidence in the state, there would be a universal civil code, a goal enshrined in the constitution's directive principles. Both reservations and separate family laws were meant to disappear as free India moved to the ideal of liberal democracy of autonomous citizens and an end to permanent minorities.

The organization of which Madani was part emerged as the voice of nationalist Muslim religious leaders allied with the Indian National Congress. After independence, this organization, the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH), came to focus on education, social work, and public statements, primarily on what are taken as the interests of the Muslim community. It also over the years became a sectarian body, speaking primarily for one of the two major Sunni orientations in India, the Deobandis, although its founding vision had been more inclusive. The JUH has never been a political party, but its members participate individually in a whole range of political parties (under primarily **(p.29)** non-Muslim leadership) and a handful of its leaders have been members of the upper house of the Indian parliament.

Abul A'la Maududi

A third figure from the time of independence had virtually no role in the nationalist movement. Still, the ideology of Abul A'la Maududi (1903–1979) forms an important point in the spectrum of Islamic political thought in South Asia. It stands defiantly outside both the communitarian and the ideal liberal models of democratic political life. Maududi was an Islamist, someone who believed that an Islamic 'order', *nizam*, should structure all fields of life—political, social, economic, and not just fields linked to ethics, worship, ritual, and so forth. This was very much in the spirit of other totalizing, utopian ideologies of the mid-twentieth century like fascism and communism. Maududi is regarded as one of the two major Islamist thinkers of the twentieth century along with Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (a party that attracted substantial electoral support as Egypt struggled to transform its political system beginning in 2011). Maududi's writings have been widely translated and they profoundly influenced figures like the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, so influential on radical Islamic movements, including to the present.

Maududi had no time for traditionalist ulama like Husain Ahmad Madani. Instead, he fostered a kind of 'laicization' of Islamic authority, a major trend of the modern period, thanks substantially to print media, which opened scholarly knowledge far beyond the boundaries of the ulama who studied in seminaries. Many Islamists worldwide have been figures with professional or technical education as their starting point. Maududi's organization, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), was not meant to be a mass movement but a vanguard until such time as society as a whole was ready for an Islamic order. He stridently opposed both

the Congress and the Muslim League in the years before partition, and he forbade his followers to even vote or participate in what was a non-Islamic system, which Pakistan, as a Muslim but not an Islamic state, would be. Madani accused him of living in a dream world. How could you possibly create an Islamic order *even among Muslims* in India? South Asian Muslims are not like Muslims in some countries that share a single or at most a couple of law-school **(p.30)** or sectarian orientations. In India, Madani argued, the fissures are beyond counting. And Madani pointed out that in the current age politics depended on consent, on winning public opinion. How could everyone possibly agree on what was Islamic?

In 1947 Maududi moved to Pakistan and redefined his movement as a political party to work towards an 'Islamic state'. The JI is institutionally separate in each of the countries of South Asia as well as in Kashmir, and each has adapted to its own political culture. The subsequent malleability of these separate organizations is fascinating. Thus, in India, the JI evolved as an educational and social-work organization. It became a particularly outspoken defender of human rights and democracy, as minorities in fact often are. JI members now vote.¹⁴ Indian Jamaatis serve vegetarian food at their annual meeting so that non-Muslims and others will feel welcome. In 2011, core members founded a political party, the Welfare Party of India, its name signalling its secularity, inclusiveness, and stated goal of concern with the welfare of the socially disadvantaged. It adheres to the communitarian model, invoking the constitution and law codes in the interests of preserving what they see as Muslim cultural and, increasingly, economic interests. Democratic reality appears to be the antidote to totalitarian theories of any kind.

A Contemporary Figure: Maulana Ghulam Muhammad Vastanvi

Before turning to the fourth and final figure, it is important to underline the new context in which he operates in contrast to that of the leaders who emerged during the nationalist movement. The new context was shaped decisively, of course, with partition. With **(p.31)** partition, the Muslim population dropped from 25 per cent of the whole to a far smaller percentage, no longer a majority in any state and a majority in only one district (in Kerala) in the entire country. Some areas of the country were subjected, during partition and its aftermath, to what can only be called 'ethnic cleansing'.¹⁵ Muslims in India have subsequently experienced considerable prejudice and at times virulent anti-Muslim violence—no matter that most ordinary Muslims had little awareness even of what was going on at the time of partition, no matter the principled opposition to partition on the part of many leading Muslims, and no matter the actual political loyalty that Muslims in fact maintain. In addition to the continuing communitarian—and Hindu communalist—theme in Muslim politics, two other characteristics of Muslim political life are noteworthy.

One is the extent to which Islamic scholars, the ulama, have claimed to be the only spokesmen for other Muslims and typically recognized as such in the society at large. This, of course, was not the case in the pre-partition era. Since Muslims in independent India have legal recognition on the grounds of religion, however, presumably cultural specialists, so to speak, are those who should speak for them—reinforcing the stereotype that the only important variable about Muslim behaviour everywhere is the fact of their religion. Since independence, Muslim issues have been dominated, despite protests throughout from other Muslims, precisely by the symbols of ‘Muslim cultural rights’—Urdu language, the status of the Muslim university at Aligarh, and, above all, defence of what is taken as Islamic personal law—issues on which religious leaders have been particularly eloquent.¹⁶

(p.32) The biggest public demonstration on the part of Muslims after partition took place in 1986 to protest what was seen as an assault on Muslim personal law. This was the decision of an Indian Supreme Court judge (of Hindu background) who was adjudicating a case of maintenance for a divorced woman under the common criminal code (granted in order to prevent vagrancy), a common strategy. He used the occasion, gratuitously, one might say, to point to the regressive nature of Islamic law on this issue and insist on the value of a common code. In the protest that followed, the Congress party prime minister, eager to avoid alienating Muslim voters, allied with a newly empowered, self-appointed, All India Muslim Personal Law Board (comprised of ulama), and succeeded in passing a law that required recourse to Muslim personal law, not the criminal code, in matters of divorce.¹⁷ This decision fed into the mounting anti-Muslim, anti-Congress Hindu nationalist movement of the 1980s, which came to focus on another cultural symbol, a sixteenth-century mosque in the town of Ayodhya, erroneously identified as having been built after the destruction of a Hindu temple marking the birthplace of the god Ram. In 1992 carefully organized cadres of right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations, with local official compliance, tore down the mosque, stone by stone, and set off a wave of anti-Muslim violence.

Another important trend, however, has been, in a sense, precisely the opposite of this focus on cultural symbols. In recent years, increasing numbers of Muslims have insisted that these concerns **(p.33)** in the end make remarkably little difference to the actual lives of ordinary Muslims. What matters are Muslim economic and social interests. Several studies have made clear that although there are a sprinkling of high-powered Muslim success stories, from three of the presidents of India to celebrated figures in technology, film, sports, and so forth, the vast majority of Muslims fall deep into what are considered the ‘backward’ class. There are, to be sure, considerable regional variations, with Muslims in the very poor, populous northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal, where most are concentrated among the most disadvantaged, and Muslims in the south, both relatively less impoverished and less embattled (as

Torsten Tschacher's essay in Chapter 4 makes clear). Extreme violence against Muslims has also been regional, with the most horrific episodes, roughly a decade apart, taking place in western India. This was the post-Ayodhya violence in 1992, with Bombay a centre; and, even worse, 2002, in Gujarat. A report commissioned by the prime minister in 2006, popularly known as the Sachar Committee Report, addressed the general socio-economic conditions of Muslims and definitively documented anti-Muslim discrimination, poverty, and marginalization as a major social problem. This argument was demonstrated, for example, in the minute representation of Muslims in public services like the military and police, as well as abysmal levels of educational achievement and public employment that placed Muslims overall somewhere between the SCs and those known as 'other backward castes' (OBCs).¹⁸

Since the Sachar Committee Report and other documents on Muslims in recent years, Muslim leaders have above all demanded the same reservations that has been extended over all these decades to **(p.34)** SCs and STs and, increasingly, to OBCs.¹⁹ Muslim leaders thus can be understood as seeking a convergence between the two forms of communitarian protection promised in the constitution. At base the need for reservations at the time of partition was understood to be cultural, to be a matter of pollution and other taboos within Hinduism; there was no motivation to solve an economic or general social problem that met the needs of the disadvantaged. Nonetheless, reservations have come to be granted to those whose status, whatever the ideology, is basically that of 'untouchables' even if they are Buddhist (typically by conversion) or Christian. Moreover, the list of those Hindu castes entitled to compensatory discrimination has been expanded to include those whose situation is often parallel to those of most Muslims, namely the OBCs. There is no question, ironically, that the extension of reservations to OBCs with the proposed enactment of the Mandal Committee Report in 1990 fuelled the Hindu-right campaign against Muslims: calls for Hindu unity under the symbol of Lord Ram deflected intra-Hindu competition onto opposition against Muslims. At the state level, in Gujarat in particular, it has been shown that successive demands from below have routinely preceded waves of anti-Muslim activism.²⁰

There has been, in recent years, a proliferation of parties founded by Muslims across the country. Like the Welfare Party, described above, these are secular parties open to all, like other regional parties with caste, or caste cluster, membership at their core. The parties emphasize not only Muslim interests—whether based on identity or income—but issues of justice and non-discrimination as well.²¹ **(p.35)** There have long been a few Muslim parties in the south, which take up not only Muslim but also general issues, and form part of diverse alliances. The move towards parties organized by Muslims is controversial. However, it reflects the fact that Muslims now have documentation that their needs in terms of education, employment, and political representation are not being met, and, arguably, the contrary as well, that

Muslims feel a greater self-confidence at asserting their democratic rights in public, especially if couched in economic terms. 'Backwardness' is a legitimate issue in India's political life; 'religious' community as such is taken as 'communal', and thus unacceptable. (Thus, articles reporting conversion to Islam or Christianity invariably justify the action as a desire to escape from social discrimination, never to find spiritual satisfaction, let alone, as converts are alleged to do, to seek any educational or material benefits.) Muslim political figures are looking specifically now to parties that will meet the increasing Muslim demand for 'reservations' of public-sector jobs and educational slots.²² These campaigns have largely been at the state level and many have been successful.

Reservations in India are as controversial as affirmative action is in the United States, but embracing that strategy aligns Muslims with what now is an entrenched dimension of the Indian political system. Democracy has transformed politics in India, and nothing in that regard is more striking than the rise of those previously regarded as part of the very bottom of society. In the important state of Uttar Pradesh, a woman of Dalit background has been the chief minister and the state's landscape has been transformed by parks and statues that celebrate the lower classes—like the Jyotiba Phule Park in the capital Lucknow, alluded to in the subtitle to this chapter, which is a popular **(p. 36)** place for political rallies. That a Muslim leadership once symbolized by the dapper Jinnah now identifies itself with the interests of this class is a remarkable change, and points, in fact, to the sociological broadening of India's political leadership overall.

Given the self-evident fact that the population that is identified as Muslim faces multiple problems of education, employment, and so forth, one must assume that leaders from other backgrounds than religious leadership will increasingly come to the fore, as in fact they already have. As concerns now centre so squarely on economic interests, one might well expect not only the issues of politicians, but also the backgrounds of politicians, to change.

For the moment, however, the activities of the ulama, not only in political parties but also in organizations like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and Islamic seminaries and welfare organizations, continue to be influential. Among the most important of the ulama spokesmen are those associated with the Darul Uloom at Deoband, the subcontinent's most important Islamic seminary. Since the Taliban share the sectarian orientation of Deoband, and since Deobandis have been known for radical militancy in Pakistan, Indian Deobandis have been particularly challenged to insist that they are wholly distinct from these positions.²³ In part to counter any reputation of subversion, in February 2008 the seminary at Deoband hosted a conference of some ten thousand Islamic scholars from across the nation, who denounced all forms of terrorism, proclaiming that it was un-Islamic **(p.37)** to kill innocent people. At the same

time, however, the conference also denounced unwarranted blame and ‘profiling’ levelled against Muslims.²⁴ As one commentator put it, they protested ‘the hounding of Muslim youth and mounting Islamophobic offensives across the world, including India, in the name of countering “terror”’.²⁵ Speakers at the conference singled out ‘Zionists’ and ‘Western Crusaders’ as the cause of such problems, a sign that the anti-Americanism evident above all in Pakistan may have increased appeal for many Indian Muslims as well. This conference brought strong denunciations of violence on the part of Americans and others in Iraq and Afghanistan—which speakers labelled the real ‘terrorism’—as well as implications of covert action in oppressing Muslims in places like India as part of a worldwide campaign against Muslims. This emphasis in the Indian case, arguably, has the particular advantage in that it serves to identify distant oppressors instead of one’s fellow countrymen with whom there is an overriding need for peaceful relationships.

Those who follow Indian Muslim politics have been riveted by a controversy over the seminary’s leadership that unfolded in late 2010 and 2011. The figure at the centre of this controversy was the final Muslim leader I introduce here, Maulana Ghulam Muhammad Vastanvi. In late 2010, the ruling council at Deoband named Vastanvi to be the new vice chancellor. At the end of July 2011, that decision was revoked and Vastanvi’s resignation was requested. In many ways this was an Indian story. If, as argued here, Deobandis and other Muslims participate in the political arena, as do other Indians, their **(p.38)** small-scale politics also, not surprisingly, share the characteristics of the larger culture. The winning side was of ‘superior caste’, a family of north-Indian, Urdu-speaking, ‘sayyids’, who thus were part of the north-Indian well-born class that has dominated Muslim political leadership. Detractors called the school ‘a family fiefdom’. Vastanvi, in contrast, was of a rural, trading-caste background from the western state of Gujarat, ‘a non-forward caste’ Muslim, as some described him. The whole episode could be seen as driven by the kind of caste/class and regional competition over institutions that Indians of all religious backgrounds know well. To add to the interests at stake, one of Vastanvi’s foremost supporters was a member of the council who also headed an important political party in Assam, positioned in state politics in rivalry with the Congress party, associated with some of the key members of the winning family, the Madani family, one of whose distinguished members was introduced above.²⁶ All this is a reminder not only of the sociological differences among Muslims, but also of the inevitable tensions between political ideals and on-the-ground behaviour in both micro and macro political contexts.

The issue picked up by the media, however, was to make this a story about Muslims’ cultural ‘backwardness’ characteristic of an always-suspect madrasa. Vastanvi has an MBA and is a seminary graduate, an educational entrepreneur who runs schools with high-quality technical training across western India. While favouring the new cause of reservations for Muslims, as do other leaders

at the seminary,²⁷ Vastanvi also stood out for a commitment to technical education and programmes to make Muslims more employable generally. He declared himself in favour of the madrasa making fewer public pronouncements through fatwas that tend to inflame public opinion about Islam, a subject taken up in this volume by Taberezh Ahmed Neyazi (Chapter 9). Vastanvi also suggested that obsession **(p.39)** with politics was less common among religious scholars in western India and more common in the north. All this seemed a breath of fresh air.

What gave fuel to Vastanvi's opponents in the controversy was a comment he made that Muslims in Gujarat should not dwell on grievances but take advantage of the state's economic opportunities—for which he gave credit to the chief minister of Gujarat, the infamous Narendra Modi, who is tarred with substantial responsibility for the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat that saw perhaps a thousand Muslims killed and hundreds of thousands of others displaced. This comment was arguably blown up to an unreasonable level, especially given Vastanvi's clarifications that he in no way intended to minimize the horror of what happened or the role of political figures in it. To have Vastanvi resign, therefore, became, as one commentator put it, a good occasion for 'madrasa bashing',²⁸ the rejection of a figure committed to technical education and, presumably, eschewing adoption of a position as victim.

If one can get beyond such 'bashing', it is clear that even in the face of violence and other challenges, there is constructive debate going on among India's most important ulama and among other Muslims. They are experimenting with a range of political strategies and throughout they hold to a vocal insistence on 'Nehruvian secularism' in the face of strident voices that would eschew it. Indeed, some have argued that given the strength of both explicit and 'soft' Hindu nationalism, it is India's Muslims who are among those most ardently keeping alive the country's founding ideals, commitment to the constitution and to legal processes, as their best hope of flourishing as equal citizens.

That commitment was clear when one of the most awaited judicial decisions in India's history was finally handed down in September 2010. This was a verdict adjudicating rights to the site of the Ayodhya **(p.40)** mosque. Ignoring the criminality of the demolition (and the ensuing anti-Muslim violence), and accepting as a legitimate basis for a property decision the 'un-secular' criterion of Hindu 'belief', the judges strove for a Solomonic division of the property among three contending parties, two of them organized groups of Hindus and one Muslim. That such a decision seemed reasonable to so many troubled others who saw the decision as a challenge to India's secularism. Interested Muslim parties responded in the classic Indian style: by launching an appeal. When a far less important mosque was demolished in Delhi in 2011 as part of a

‘gentrification’ campaign (a reminder of how class tensions reinforce religious ones), one commentator noted that even poor Muslims wanted nothing more than fairness, and he underlined their ‘persistent attachment . . . to the rule of law. The language of rights ... is the meeting ground of Muslims of all persuasions, and the principal terrain of their counteroffensive’.²⁹ It is through the courts that Muslims have struggled to find justice for the 2002 massacres in Gujarat.³⁰

In a similar spirit, Muslim leaders hold to the constitutional provisions for separate personal laws and reservations. Whether identifying some ‘backward’ Muslim groups as a kind of ‘caste’, or emphasizing poverty across religions as an indicator for those deserving affirmative action, there is an effort now to stress shared economic needs more than the distinctive Muslim cultural concerns that have long been the hallmark of Muslim politics.³¹ Vastanvi, unlike the well-known **(p.41)** Muslim leaders of the nationalist era, may have had no more than his ‘15 minutes of fame’. The episode in which he was at the centre, however, brings home the whole range of strategies that are currently in play. Front and centre have been the claims on what are seen as economic entitlements, in some cases, but not all, replacing the emphasis on preservation of distinctive Muslim cultural symbols, like the Urdu language and the status of minority institutions. These issues are arguably more relevant to elite concerns, and irrelevant to today’s political culture across much of India based more in vernacular cultures with core/ethnic/caste support. Some, like Vastanvi, seem to favour a de-emphasis on any politics at all—coupled in his case with retreat from the cultural limelight with fewer fatwas bearing the Deoband imprimatur—in favour of grass-roots educational work. The strategies at stake put Muslims squarely within what have been the two major trends in Indian political life in the last three decades: the influence of the Hindu right, of which every Muslim political leader must take account, and the rise of the ‘bahujan’, the depressed majority as they now call themselves, which brings home in the Muslim case the sociological gaps which the long emphasis on Muslim cultural symbols had obscured. It is these trends and concerns that are far more characteristic of Muslim behaviour in India than any suspected militancy that some may assume to be inevitable.

Notes:

(¹) According to a recent Wikileaks revelation reported in the *Times of India*, dated 4 September 2011, however, US officials believe that the number is as high as between 160 and 180 million despite the official number of 130 million in the 2001 census. See http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-09-04/india/30112634_1_indian-muslims-shias-barelvi-and-deobandi (accessed on 18 February 2012).

(²) In the state elections in Uttar Pradesh (February–March 2012), one analysis claimed that the Muslim constituency ‘at 18 per cent of the state’s population is bound to be a game-changer’, possibly significant in as many as 130

constituencies, with the redrawing of boundaries that gave more weight to urban areas where Muslims are often concentrated. There was general agreement that the Muslim vote would be widely spread among various parties. Aditya Menon. 2012. ‘“M” Factor Can Cut Both Ways in Battle over Minority Quota’, *India Today*, 22 February, available online at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/muslims-factor-in-uttar-pradesh-assembly-elections-2012/1/174721.html> (accessed on 24 February 2012).

(³) Nicholas D. Kristof. 2011. ‘Is Islam the Problem?’, *New York Times*, 5 March, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/opinion/06kristof.html> (accessed on 28 August 2013).

See also the conclusion of economic analyst John Cassidy: ‘The day-to-day worship of the sort practiced by hundreds of millions of Muslims,’ as he puts it, has no bearing on the economic and political lives of those countries. John Cassidy. 2011. ‘Prophet Motive: The Economies of the Arab World Lag behind the West. Is Islam to Blame?’, *New Yorker*, 28 February, available online at http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/02/28/110228fa_fact_cassidy#ixzz1XwxLACtX (accessed on 18 February 2012).

(⁴) Another possible categorization of India’s political life, associated primarily with Partha Chatterjee, is a distinction between ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’, which may seem to echo the distinction I am making here. Chatterjee’s distinction, however, has been criticized as making a comparison with an ideal on the one hand and, for ‘political society’, actual anti-democratic behaviour on the ground. Any attempt to map distinct social categories into either of these ‘societies’ by placing the more educated in the former category and the lower class in the latter, in fact, falls short. Moreover, as David Gilmartin writes:

[Chatterjee’s] distinction risks obscuring the importance of ‘civil society’ not simply as a form of middle-class politics, but as an imagined political *ideal* for both upper and lower castes, rooted in the image of free individual rational choice—an ideal that is always in tension with the realities of identity and the compulsions of everyday conflict and life. Indeed, this distinction mirrors common conceptions, among upper and lower-caste Indians alike, of the interrelated—and yet opposing—elements constituting the self.

David Gilmartin. 2010. ‘Rule of Law, Rule of Life: Caste, Democracy, and the Courts in India’, *American Historical Review*, 115(2): 406–27, see p. 426. Available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/ahr.115.2.406> (accessed on 18 February 2012).

For a further critique, see also Amita Baviskar and Nandini Sundar. 2008. 'Democracy vs. Economic Transformation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(46): 87-9.

⁽⁵⁾ See the study of Jinnah and the Muslim League by Faisal Devji. 2013. *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁽⁶⁾ This was to be coupled with a federal government where they would be disproportionately represented (for example, with a third of the seats instead of the quarter represented by their population).

⁽⁷⁾ This is the argument of Ayesha Jalal in her classic study. Ayesha Jalal. 1985. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁽⁸⁾ Quoted in 'Mr. Jinnah's Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan: August 11, 1947', available online at http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html (accessed on 18 February 2012). Emphasis added.

⁽⁹⁾ See the translation of posters used in Punjab in the period immediately preceding partition to gain support for the Muslim League by denouncing all ties to the powerful and to kin rather than to a single Muslim community. David Gilmartin. 2009. 'Muslim League Appeals to the Voters of Punjab for Support of Pakistan', in Barbara D. Metcalf (ed.), *Islam in South Asia in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 409-23.

⁽¹⁰⁾ For a biography of Madani, see Barbara D. Metcalf. 2009. *Husain Ahmad Madani: The Jihad for Islam and India's Freedom*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

⁽¹¹⁾ This is from the work by Husain Ahmad Madani, *Hamara Hindustan aur us ke Faza'il*, printed as a pamphlet in 1941 and recently translated. Mohammad Anwer Hussain. *India: Our Land and Its Virtues*. New Delhi: Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, pp. 4-6.

⁽¹²⁾ Based on Madani, *Hamara Hindustan*, pp. 4-6.

⁽¹³⁾ In Pakistan, separate electorates, in contrast to India, were continued for religious minorities until 2002.

⁽¹⁴⁾ For a study of the transition in the practice of the Indian JI, see Irfan Ahmad. 2009. *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. To be sure, there are observers who see the rhetoric of the Indian JI as a smokescreen. Ahmad, moreover, documents the rise of a radicalized splinter youth movement, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). Ahmad shows their radicalization to be a response to Hindutva

violence. No one from SIMI however has been successfully convicted of actual violence.

(¹⁵) For a grim example of this in the area of Mewat, see Shail Mayaram. 1997. *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

(¹⁶) Urdu, a spoken language across north India, had by the interwar period become a symbol of Muslim identity and became an official language of Pakistan (despite being the first language of only 4 per cent of the population at the time of partition). Despite constitutional guarantees of education in the mother tongue, Urdu virtually disappeared in India in its written form outside Islamic religious institutions. Aligarh Muslim University was the first institution of higher education offering Westernized instruction specifically for Muslims and a centre of political activity throughout its long history. The uniform civil code was seen as a strategy to force Muslims to assimilate to non-Islamic behaviour.

(¹⁷) The event was known as the Shah Bano case. The law was the ironically named Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. There is an extensive literature both on the episode and on the aftermath, focusing on the extent to which judges have in fact adjudicated the law in women's favour in a process that Narendra Subramanian argues has made for a 'convergence' in actual implementation of personal law across religious boundaries. Narendra Subramanian. 2008. 'Legal Change and Gender Inequality: Changes in Muslim Family Law in India', *Law and Social Inquiry*, 33(3): 631-72.

(¹⁸) Telling statistics included 1.7 per cent of Muslims in the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology; 3 per cent in the elite administrative cadre, the Indian Administrative Service; and 1.8 per cent among the diplomatic corps. Important work showing the shocking under-representation in the police and military was done by the late Omar Khalidi, including in the following works. Omar Khalidi. 2003. *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India: Army, Police, and Paramilitary Forces During Communal Riots*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective; Omar Khalidi. 2006. *Muslims in Indian Economy*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective.

(¹⁹) Most important of the other documents was the report of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities (chaired by Ranganath Misra), submitted to the central government in May 2007, which recommended reservation as SCs for all converts from that community and an 8.4 per cent share of the existing OBC quota of 27 per cent for minorities as well as 15 per cent of positions in government and educational institutions. For excerpts of the report, see http://twocircles.net/special_reports/misra_commission_report_excerpts.html (accessed on 20 February 2012).

(²⁰) See Ornit Shani. 2007. *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(²¹) The old parties are Kerala's Indian Union Muslim League and Hyderabad's Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, each having elected members of parliament (MPs) as well as state assembly members. The All India United Democratic Front, mentioned in fn. 25 below and based in Assam, is an example of a more recent party. Smruti Koppikar, Smita Gupta, John Mary, and Venugopal Pillai. 2009. 'There's Dew on the Moss', *Outlook India*, 25 May, available online at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?240537> (accessed on 14 September 2011).

(²²) *Outlook India*. 2011. 'Deoband Favours Quotas for Muslims', *Outlook India*, 21 January, available online at <http://news.outlookindia.com/item.aspx?709180> (accessed on 14 September 2011).

(²³) For an argument challenging those who think Deobandi institutions share political ideology see Barbara D. Metcalf. (2002) "'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs', available online at <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/metcalf.htm> and an update 10 years later, "'Traditionalist' Islamic Activism: Deoband and Deobandis, Ten Years Later' (2011) available online at <http://essays.ssrc.org/10yearsafter911/%E2%80%9Ctraditionalist%E2%80%9D-islamic-activism-deoband-and-deobandis-ten-years-later/> (both accessed on 18 February 2012). One of the shocking developments during the state elections, ongoing at the time of this writing, was the claim of the 'Bareilvi' ulama, capitalizing on the public stereotype that 'Sufis' are peaceful, that their political and sectarian rivals, the Deobandis, are jihadis. For a fascinating case study of how sectarian identities are cultivated, see Arshad Alam. 2011. *Inside a Madrasa: Knowledge, Power and Islamic Identity in India*. New Delhi: Routledge.

(²⁴) PTI. 2008. 'Muslim Clerics Declare Terror "Un-Islamic"', *Times of India*, 25 February, available online at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-02-25/india/27766462_1_darul-uloom-terror-un-islamic-muslims (accessed on 14 September 2011).

(²⁵) Yoginder Sikand. 2008. 'Deoband's Anti-Terrorism Convention: Some Reflections', TwoCircles.net, 12 March, available online at http://twocircles.net/2008mar11/deobands_anti_terrorism_convention_some_reflections.html (accessed on 14 September 2011). Note too the report (at the conference which produced these papers) from Shahrukh Alam who interviewed working-class Shia Muslims in Amroha district of Uttar Pradesh. No Shia, she was told, could be a terrorist, or indeed even have a political movement given the occultation of the 12th imam.

(²⁶) The rival was Maulana Badruddin Ajmal, MP and member of the Darul Uloom's consultative council and president of the All India United Democratic Front (a political party), someone active in several organizations that organize

educational and economic development activities. He is an industrialist. See http://www.aiudf.org/our_president.html (accessed on 13 September 2011).

(²⁷) *Outlook*, 'Deoband Favours Quotas'.

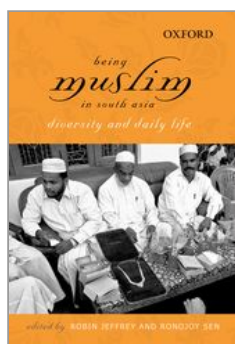
(²⁸) Abdul Rashid Agwan. 2011. 'Call for Madrasa Reform – A Manifestation of Islamophobia', 14 August, TwoCircles.net, available online at http://twocircles.net/2011aug14/call_madrasa_reform_%E2%80%93_manifestation_islamophobia.html (accessed on 16 September 2011).

(²⁹) Laurent Gayer and Chakraverti Mahajan. 2011. 'Delhi's Noor Masjid: Tales of a Martyred Mosque', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(10): 11–15, see p. 14.

(³⁰) See for example, on attempts to secure justice in one of the Gujarat murders, IANS. 2011. 'Verdict a Huge Step Forward: Setalvad', TwoCircles.net, 12 September, available online at http://twocircles.net/2011sep12/verdict_huge_step_forward_setalvad.html (accessed on 28 August 2013).

(³¹) Arguably, the trend in politics, at least in the 'Hindi heartland', is now moving away from the 'identity' politics of parties with a core constituency (like Dalits, or OBCs, or, indeed, Muslims) towards parties that make their case on developmental issues, as has been the case in Bihar. The state elections in Uttar Pradesh in early 2012, however, suggest otherwise. Moreover, far from avoiding the cultural limelight, this season has seen intra-Muslim sectarian squabbling reach new heights given the charges noted in fn. 21 above, as well as the successful Deobandi effort to keep Salman Rushdie from appearing at the Jaipur Literary Festival in January 2012. See William Dalrymple. 2012. 'Why Salman Rushdie's Voice Was Silenced in Jaipur', *Guardian*, 26 January, available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/jan/26/salman-rushdie-jaipur-literary-festival> (accessed on 20 February 2012). Dalrymple notes the 'razor-edge election' in Uttar Pradesh as playing into the connivance of politicians in the protest, and calls, inter alia, for a repeal of colonial-era legislation that puts substantial restrictions on free speech.

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Imagining Religion

Portraits of Islamic Consciousness in Pakistan

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Abstract and Keywords

Religious consciousness is a symbolic universe that gives expressions to deeply held religious beliefs. A product of interpretative communities of the past and present, this universe provides the convictions and ideals that act as primary texts for indexing social reality. Using empirical data on how Pakistani Muslims imagine Islam this chapter will aim to provide portraits of religious consciousness. The empirical evidence demonstrates a conflict of conscience among Pakistani Muslims. It shows a dominant mindset characterized by self-sufficiency of Islamic texts and an attitude towards them that is literalist, anti-rational and anti-interpretive co-existing with a pervasive sense of common humanity, kindness and a genuine concern for the welfare of the underprivileged. The chapter explores the development of this mindset and how it compensates for the feelings of alienation, powerlessness, economic and technological underdevelopment and concludes with observations on its implications for the current dilemmas facing Pakistan and other Muslim countries.

Keywords: religious belief, Pakistan, co-existence, literal interpretation, alienation, conflicts of conscience

Islam was a pivotal factor in mobilizing the support of South Asian Muslims for the creation of Pakistan in 1947. But its role in shaping the social, cultural, and political destiny of the country has been mired in conflict, contradictions, and paradoxes. Muslim leaders who spearheaded the struggle for Pakistan and

became political leaders of the new country failed to promote an inclusive Pakistani nationalism that would have accommodated the divisive forces of ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of the new country. Instead, they positively discouraged evolution of such nationalism and fostered a nationalism based on the assumption that all Pakistani Muslims were already a nation rather than a potential nation and exhorted different ethnic groups to subordinate all aspects of their ethnic and cultural identities to the nationalism **(p.43)** rooted in Islam. It was assumed that Pakistani nationalism and ethnic and regional identities were mutually incompatible. Paradoxically, they could not agree on the status of Islam in the country's constitution.¹

The political consequences of this policy have been horrendous. The country has endured a bloody war of secession over Bangladesh. While religious piety, as manifested in personal devotion and religious practice, has visibly increased among Pakistani masses, institutional and political roles of Islam have become a focus of heated divisive debate in the country. The evidence also suggests that religious institutions and leaders suffer from a trust deficit in the public mind and religious parties have rarely attracted more than 5 per cent of votes in the national elections. Perhaps the greatest irony is that despite increasing devotional religiosity of Pakistanis and increasing public roles of religious institutions such as sharia courts and sharia laws, Islam has not proven to be the glue for national unity. On the contrary, it has become a source of endemic religious and sectarian conflicts and insurgencies that are fracturing the social, cultural, and political fabric of society, making Pakistan one of the most violent and dangerous countries in the world.

This chapter seeks to undertake an analysis of these trends by focusing on the nature of religious consciousness. The analysis will be based on empirical data on how Pakistani Muslims imagine Islam. Religious consciousness in this chapter refers to a symbolic universe that gives expression to deeply held religious beliefs. In modern discourses it is frequently used descriptively and analytically to explain the nature of Muslim religiosity and the character of Islamic collective movements. A product of interpretative communities of the past and present religious consciousness, provides the convictions and ideals that act as primary texts for indexing social reality.

Portraits of Islamic Consciousness

One of the most eminent Pakistani scholars of Islam in the twentieth century, Fazlur Rahman, in his book, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, **(p.44)** describes the central aim of the Quran as: *to establish a viable social order on earth that will be just and ethically based*.² He goes on to point out the emphasis placed on justice, humanism, mercy, compassion, and charity in Islam. I describe these ethical and moral precepts as the *beautiful* in Islam. But any observer of the

contemporary Pakistani society would not find it difficult to see some of the *ugly* practices carried out in the name of Islam, as the following account will testify.

Islamization, Sectarianism, and the Hudood Laws in Pakistan

After assuming power through a military coup in 1977, General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq embarked on an Islamization programme. Lacking political support from the country's main political parties, Zia turned to Islamic parties, mainly the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), to legitimize his martial law administration. In return he adopted the JI's Islamization programme of institutional reform and introduction of sharia (Islamic law) in the country. The main aim of this programme was to enhance the role of the state in giving direction to the religious discourse in the country.³ Zia was also attracted to the Islamization programme because it suited his own religious background and personal inclinations.⁴

(p.45) The Islamization programme claimed to manifest a universal Islamic vision, but in reality it was based on a narrow interpretation of Islamic theology and law propounded by the orthodox Sunni Deobandi-Hanafi school and consequently was vigorously opposed by the Shias. Buoyed with pride from the Iranian revolution of 1979, Pakistani Shias, constituting around 20 per cent of the population, asserted the validity of their own religious interpretations. The Shias were deeply suspicious of the Islamization programme and saw it as a threat to their social position and religious status. In fact, the programme produced a siege mentality among the Shias and led to their rejection of Sunni prescriptions in matters of religious conduct such as laws pertaining to inheritance and zakat (obligatory charitable giving, or tax for benefit of the poor).⁵

In the face of ardent Shia opposition, Zia's regime capitulated and granted Shias exemption from all those aspects of the Islamization programme that contravened Shia law. The capitulation to Shia demands was seen by Zia's Sunni political allies, including the JI, as nothing short of constricting their vision of a universal Islamic state based on Sunni theology. This perception exacerbated the latent sectarian divisions in Pakistani society and paved the way for the rise of militant sectarian organizations, such as the Sunni Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan **(p. 46)** (SSP or Pakistan's Army of the Prophet's Companions). Established in 1985, the organization was dedicated to the physical elimination of the Shias. The organization was established under the name Anjuman Sipah-i-Sahaba (ASS) but when they realized what the acronym meant in English the name was changed to Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, Sunni Tehrik (Sunni Movement), Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-i-Muhammadi (Movement for the Protection of Mohammad's Religious Law), Laskhar-e-Jhangvi (Jhangvi Army), Laskhar-e-Taiba (the Army of the Pure), the Shia Tehrik-i-Jafaria Pakistan (Pakistan's Shia Movement), and Sipah-i-Muhammad (Army of Muhammad).

Over time these organizations splintered into various groups and became involved in sectarian violence to safeguard and assert the interests of their respective communities. Zia's Islamization policies politicized sectarian religious identities in Pakistan and gave rise to sectarian activism and violence, including suicide bombing.⁶ Except for the Shia Sipah-i-Muhammad Pakistan, all main militant sectarian organizations are of orthodox Sunni-Deobandi-Wahhabi theological persuasion.

Another significant development arising from the Islamization policies was the privileging of the orthodox and puritanical sects, Deobandis and Ahle Hadith. These had close theological affinity to Wahhabism and their political parties, JI and Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Islam, and received funding and government patronage at the expense of the moderate Sufi sect, the Barelvi, which represented popular Islam (Islam of the masses). The government patronage sought to strengthen the orthodox Sunni institutions by providing government funds to their existing madrasas and for the establishment of new ones. Zia's government saw the expansion of the orthodox madrasa sector as an instrument for entrenching Sunni identity in the public sector, especially in government institutions. The madrasas and their students were part of the government strategy to contain Shia political activism and the political and geostrategic threat of Shia Islamism, which was linked to the Islamic revolution in Iran.⁷

(p.47) This policy accelerated the growth of madrasas across Pakistan. The number of madrasa students (who mainly come from poorer backgrounds) increased from approximately 100,000 in 1975 to 570,000 in 1998. Many madrasas began to provide their students with military training combining sectarian vigilance with a jihadist outlook.⁸ Consequently, this led to a serious escalation in sectarian, especially Shia-Sunni violence, in Pakistan. Since 1990, sectarian organizations have started to employ suicide bombing as a weapon in terrorizing and killing their opponents. The sectarianism received a further boost from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979.

The *Hudood* Laws in Pakistan

The Islamization policy introduced a series of laws known as the *hudood* ordinances, governing offences against property, consumption of intoxicants, *zina* (fornication and adultery) and *qazf* (bearing false witness). In Islamic jurisprudence, *hudood* refers to punishments prescribed by the Quran or Sunnah. The policy was presented as necessary to fulfil one of the fundamental obligations of the Islamic state to create a just and equal society. Behind these platitudes, however, the real reason was to bolster the regime's legitimacy among the Pakistani masses, and they were widely regarded as a cynical attempt to exploit the common people's devotion to Islam.

The *hudood* ordinance regarding *zina* covers fornication, adultery, rape, kidnapping, abducting, or inducing a woman to commit illicit sex or compelling her to marry against her will, enticement or detention of a woman with criminal intent, and the selling or buying of a person for purposes of prostitution. The law provides *hudd* punishments that are fixed, and the rules of evidence are stringent. It requires the confession of the accused before a competent court, or evidence of four pious adult male Muslim witnesses. Non-Muslim males can be witnesses only when the accused is a non-Muslim. Such evidentiary rules clearly discriminate against women and non-Muslims.

Under the laws that existed before the introduction of the *hudood* laws, premarital sex was a crime only in the case of adulterous sex between a married woman and man; it carried a punishment of five **(p.48)** years' imprisonment, or a fine, or both. The crime of adultery was bailable. Complaints of adultery could be made only by the husband of a woman or, in his absence, by someone who had care of such a woman on his behalf. Women could not be punished and, if the complainant chose to drop the charges, criminal proceedings against the accused were stopped.

After the *hudood* laws were implemented, the situation changed fundamentally. These laws have converted *zina* from an offence against an individual to one against the state. Anyone can make a complaint against anybody else, and the police are authorized to initiate a criminal case. The accused individuals are considered guilty until proven innocent, and both the woman and her male partner are liable to punishment.

In a society like Pakistan, with its deeply embedded patriarchal beliefs and attitudes, the *hudood* laws in general and the law pertaining to *zina* in particular, have been widely and recklessly abused. In particular, they have become an instrument of oppression against women. As long as only the husband could register the case and only the male accused could be punished for adultery, husbands were reluctant to prosecute in order to save or protect their family honour. The *hudood* laws have become a tool used to victimize and humiliate women. A man accused by a woman of sexual assault or rape frequently escapes prosecution by simply swearing innocence on the Quran and the woman, particularly if she is pregnant, then faces the full weight of the *zina* law.

The vast majority of *zina* allegations are either false or based on suspicion. True, a large majority of *hudood* cases in the superior courts have been decided in favour of the women involved, but only after the accused has suffered long periods of incarceration and humiliation while awaiting trial. The following cases are typical of the abuse of the *hudood* laws.

1. In 2002, in the Pakistani city of Kohat, Zafran Bibi, after being sexually violated and discovering that she was pregnant, went to the police to

report a case of rape. Instead of investigating the case, the police brought a charge of adultery against her, and a court sentenced her to death by stoning (a *hudd* punishment). On appeal, the Federal Shariat Court acquitted (p.49) her but, for weeks, she was kept shackled and isolated in a death-row cell.

2. In 1988, in response to a complaint bought by her ex-husband after she remarried, Shahida Perveen was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery. She was finally acquitted after a retrial ordered by the Federal Shariat Court upheld the validity of the earlier divorce and subsequent marriage to her new husband. The humiliation she faced forced Perveen and her husband to leave their home and community to restart their life elsewhere.

3. A couple arrested at their home in 1980 for 'attempted' *zina* (which is not a crime even under the *hudood* laws) spent seven years in prison awaiting trial before being sentenced in January 1987 by a court in Karachi to 10 lashes and five years of rigorous imprisonment. On appeal, the couple was acquitted by the Federal Shariat Court in March 1987.

The supposed Islamization of the Pakistan Penal Code did not stop with laws that disadvantaged women. Between 1980 and 1986, Zia's regime made five amendments to the code that introduced new punishments for blasphemy and insulting the sentiments of Muslims. Thousands of people, especially from religious minorities, have been imprisoned under these laws. Many have committed suicide, and others, even after having been acquitted by the courts of any wrongdoing, have had to flee the country for their own safety. In early 2011, Salmaan Taseer, governor of Pakistan's most populous province Punjab, was assassinated by one of his bodyguards for his opposition to blasphemy laws and for supporting a Pakistani Christian woman, Aasia, who had been jailed under the blasphemy laws. Amidst widespread mourning for the governor there were people who publicly announced that his death was a punishment for insulting Islam. Within weeks of his assassination, the country's Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, was shot dead by gunmen, also for his opposition to blasphemy laws. The Pakistani media, especially the Urdu media, played very provocative role. Instead of providing proper context and infusing awareness about the law and its misuse, it catered to religious passions by giving credence to the extremist views that Taseer was a blasphemer (p.50) who deserved to be punished by death and portrayed his murderer as a hero and defender of Islam.⁹

The *hudood* laws and their successors have severely eroded and undermined the constitutional guarantees of life and liberty for all citizens. Instead of protecting honour, life, and the fundamental rights of a citizen, these laws have become instruments of oppression. They have made adultery or fornication—a consensual act between two adults—a crime against the state. At the same time, they too often redefine rape—in reality a non-consensual, violent act *against*

women—into a consensual act *initiated* by women, since a woman who is unable to prove that she has been raped opens herself to prosecution for adultery. The complainant thus becomes subject to *hudd* punishments.

Since the promulgation of the *zina* ordinance, allegations of *zina*, instead of declining, have increased dramatically. *Zina* cases now run into thousands. In some places, they constitute the majority of cases dealt with by the police. The *hudood* laws, far from creating a just and equal society, have succeeded only in imprisoning half of the country's population 'in a web of barbaric laws and customs'.¹⁰

According to some Islamic scholars, the introduction of these laws represents an ugly blot on the divine purity of Islamic doctrine. In a carefully researched book, Dr Muhammad Tufail Hashmi, a well-known Pakistani Islamic scholar, argues that in conferring supposed 'divine' status on the Islamic *hudd* laws as well as on supporting laws laid out in the Pakistan Penal Code, the *hudood* ordinances violate the sanctity of the divinely ordained laws of Islam. They also convey a flawed and unworthy image of Islam to the world. In Islamic juristic tradition, punishing an innocent is a greater and more serious sin than acquitting a guilty person.¹¹

Conflict of Conscience in Contemporary Islam

The cases described above are symptomatic of a deep conflict within the religious and social conscience of Muslims in Pakistan today. **(p.51)** While these practices and laws do not enjoy universal acceptance, the fact that a significant proportion of Pakistani Muslims at least tolerate them indicates a troubling level of moral lethargy.

It is also important to emphasize that the examples described above coexist with a pervasive sense of common humanity, kindness, and genuine concern for the well-being of others and the underprivileged. One only needs to reflect on the outpouring of generous financial assistance provided by ordinary Muslims and the personal anguish and sympathy they felt for the victims of the December 2004 Asian tsunami, which devastated Aceh, and the destruction wreaked by the 2005 South Asian earthquake in Pakistan. Other examples of generosity and a genuine concern for the well-being of the underprivileged can be found in the institution of *waqf* (charitable trusts). Spread across Pakistan and the Muslim world and numbering in the thousands, the *waqf* deliver educational, health, and welfare services to millions of poor people.

Then there is the celebrated Islamic institution of zakat, through which billions of rupees are raised in Pakistan each year and applied to the well-being of impoverished and disadvantaged Muslims. In addition, there are countless privately funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country working

to promote activities ranging from the advancement of human rights to caring for the welfare of the disadvantaged.

Do the laws and practices described above negate not only the humanitarian traditions of Islam but also the essential message of the Quran, which enjoins believers to establish a viable social order on earth that will be just and ethically based? Only the most deluded or self-absorbed Muslims could remain unconcerned by the sheer quantity and ugliness of the incidents described earlier. The *hudood* and blasphemy laws of Pakistan, the seriously flawed judicial system, and the rampant oppression of women and the poor (who are the main victims of the *hudood* ordinances and other similar laws) cannot be attributed to an aberrational fanaticism considered marginal and unrepresentative. The evidence suggests instead a pattern of abusive practice.

The Making of the Contemporary Islamic Consciousness: Salafabism
Such violent, repulsive, and publicly visible acts could be interpreted as the by-product of social malignancies that have festered for a long time. Such acts are the product of a particular type of mentality that **(p.52)** has been shaped by interpretive communities that emerged to contextualize the meanings of the sacred texts. These communities have developed explanations of existential conditions in order to reinforce the moral foundation of the group. This symbolic universe of beliefs, convictions, and ideals act as primary text to index social realities.¹²

It is important to keep this idea of 'interpretative communities' in mind when we consider the cases described earlier. The behaviour described were not the acts of a few marginalized individuals who had been socially and politically corrupted. People do not just wake up one day and decide to commit acts of terrorism, kill in the name of Islam, or support unjust laws. They are not naturally inclined to sanction acts by the religious establishment of the state that humiliate victims of rape and injustice in the name of Islam. Such acts take place because of social dynamics that have desensitized and deconstructed a society's sense of moral virtue and ethics.

Theological constructs and social responses that tolerate the commission of acts of cruelty are the product of a long process of indoctrination and acculturation. Indoctrination facilitates their commission; acculturation mutes or mitigates the sense of outrage over the offensive behaviour. Each abusive act committed in the name of Islam becomes a historical precedent, and each precedent can carry normative weight and therefore influence the meanings of Islam and Islamic values in the future.

Religious consciousness in a Muslim society is shaped by the interaction between that society's interpretive communities and its dominant theological orientations. Interpretive communities arise among members of social groups to develop explanations of the events that shape their personal lives, collective

history, and temperament to reinforce and strengthen the moral foundations of the group. This universal social process, essentially a type of intellectual discourse, has a strong influence on all forms of religious consciousness.

(p.53) Theological orientations are the dominant forms of religious ideas and practice. Their claims of being closer to the authentic and true meanings of the divine doctrines give them precedence over rival religious ideas and practices. Theological orientations are transmitted through families, communities, and institutions and are also profoundly influenced by the society's interpretive communities. Just as the foundational community of Arabia shaped many of Islam's fundamental beliefs and practices, so also the succeeding historical epochs have nurtured and shaped the theological orientations that followed.

To make sense of the incidents described earlier, we need first to analyse three streams of Islamic consciousness that developed under the historical conditions faced by South Asian Muslim communities over the previous few centuries. Under the conditions of economic underdevelopment, technological backwardness, and powerlessness, elements of these three streams have somehow fused to give rise to a new hybrid Islamic consciousness: Salafabism, a development that provides the most likely explanation for the active support or passive tolerance of the *hudood* laws and other acts of violence. This Islamic consciousness is constructed by the social, political, and economic conditions in the various Muslim countries and feeds on them. The intellectual, social, and political challenge is to undo the conditions that have given rise to Salafabism and thus lead the way to its marginalization. Doing so will require reclaiming an Islamic consciousness that honours the Islamic heritage while incorporating a critical stance towards Islamic history and texts—one that is able to confront Salafabist dogma. (In the analysis and discussion that follows, I have relied mostly on the seminal work on this subject by Khaled Abou El Fadl and Fazlur Rahman.)¹³

Apologetics

A common feature of most Muslim societies is a shared history of colonialism under European dominance. This sociopolitical experience **(p.54)** was accompanied by a culture of orientalism: an assumption of Western superiority combined with a condescending trivialization of Islamic cultural achievements. The onslaught of these processes led not only to loss of power by political and religious elites in the lands of Islam, but also to the devaluation and deprecation of Islamic beliefs and institutions. The dominant intellectual response of Muslims in South Asia and elsewhere to this challenge from around the middle of the eighteenth century came from apologetics.

Apologetics attempted to defend and salvage Islamic beliefs and traditions by simultaneously emphasizing the compatibility between Islam and modernity and adopting pietistic fictions about the supremacy of Islamic traditions. Such

fictions eschewed any critical evaluation of Islamic traditions and celebrated the presumed perfection of Islam. A key argument of apologists was that most meritorious and worthwhile modern institutions were in fact invented by Islam. According to apologists, Islam liberated women, created democracy, endorsed pluralism, protected human rights, and introduced social welfare long before these institutions ever existed in the West.

Apologists embraced the idea of resisting the destructive effects of modernity and Western hegemony, affirming self-worth, and attaining a measure of emotional empowerment. The main effect of their efforts, however, was to contribute to a sense of intellectual self-sufficiency which often descended into a moral arrogance similar to that displayed by the orientalist. However, they failed to engage Islam as a dynamic and viable tradition in everyday life. They projected a static image of Islamic tradition that was incapable of adapting to the demands of modernity without collapsing into itself. Apologists treated the Islamic tradition as if it had fossilized at the time of Prophet Muhammad and the four caliphs who succeeded him.

The decline and disintegration of traditional institutions of Islamic learning and authority under the yoke of colonialism virtually ensured the irrelevance of true Islamic intellectuals. By undermining the authority and authenticity of Islamic institutions, this disintegration produced an intellectual vacuum. Under these conditions, virtually any Muslim could regard himself or herself as an authoritative spokesperson for Islamic tradition. Islam thus came to be seen as a kind of anti-colonialist resistance ideology capable of restoring Muslim pride and political power. Such ideas played a significant role in the **(p.55)** mobilization of political support of South Asian Muslims for the creation of Pakistan. Political liberation anchored itself in a religious orientation that was puritanical, supremacist, and opportunistic.

Wahhabism

Wahhabi theology was founded by the eighteenth-century Arabian evangelist Abd al-Wahhab (d.1792) as a response to the Ottoman rule of Arabia. With puritanical zeal, al-Wahhab sought to rid Islam of all 'corruptions' and 'aberrations', such as mysticism, intercession, intellectualism, sectarianism, and rationalism, in order to restore its pristine purity. He proclaimed that Islamic purity was reclaimable with a literal implementation of Islamic texts and the commands and precedents of the Prophet and through a strict adherence to correct ritual practice. Wahhabism resisted the indeterminacy of the modern age by retreating to a strict literalism in which the sacred texts became the sole source of legitimacy. Any form of moral thought and idea not completely dependent on these texts was treated as a form of idolatry. Wahhabism viewed rational inquiry with deep suspicion and hostility. It rejected any attempt to interpret Islamic law that would accommodate modern conditions and exigencies and treated classical jurisprudential tradition as a corruption of the

true and authentic Islam. Religiously puritanical, it rejected all interpretations of the sacred texts except those of Wahhabism. Wahhabi ideas are embedded in the ideology of prominent Islamic movements.

Salafism

The Saudis have never regarded Wahhabism as a sect or a school of Islamic thought. They even object to the label Wahhabism because they regard it as the pristine Islam. In the twentieth century, Wahhabism did not spread among Muslims under its own banner but under that of Salafism. The Salafi movement in modern Islam had its genesis in the writings of such Muslim reformers and nationalists as Mohammad Abduh, Afghani, Muhammad Rashid Rida, and Abul A'la Maududi. Salafism appealed to some basic Islamic concepts, namely, that Muslims ought to follow the precedents set by the Prophet and his companions.

(p.56) Salafism is an intellectual response that developed to fruition under the conditions of postcolonial Muslim societies whose governments failed to deliver the fruits of the 'national project'; that is, jobs, economic development, welfare for citizens, and equality of citizenship. It was the kind of response that said to the ruling elites: 'You have failed to deliver the fruits of the national development because you were using secular laws; use the law of God and you will succeed.'

Salafism as it originally developed maintained that, on all issues, Muslims ought to return to the original textual sources of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet and interpret them in the light of modern needs and demands without being slavishly bound by the interpretive precedents of earlier Muslim generations. In this respect, it was a distinctive intellectual project. Salafism advocated a kind of interpretive community in which anyone was qualified to return to the divine texts and interpret their messages. Unlike Wahhabism, it was not hostile to competing Islamic juristic traditions, Sufism, or mysticism.

A great impetus to the rise of Salafism came from Muslim intellectuals who were influenced by the tradition of apologetics and who were eager to argue that modern developments such as democracy, constitutionalism, and socialism were embedded in the foundational texts of Islam. Salafi ideology concerned itself with making Islam into a political force that might transform the ummah (the universal community of Muslims) and with providing a solid basis for Islamic identity in the Muslim struggle against neocolonialism and the underdevelopment of Islamic lands. As a result, it became essentially a part of Muslim identity politics.

Salafi ideology failed to confront the challenge posed by nationalism. Unable to muster power (except in Saudi Arabia), Salafism responded by restructuring and redefining itself and, over time, became an unprincipled and diluted moral force. In the postcolonial period, Wahhabism and Salafism gradually began to merge;

by the 1970s, they had become practically indistinguishable. Both imagined a golden age of Islam, a historical utopia that they claimed was entirely retrievable and reproducible. Both remained uninterested in critical historical inquiry and responded to the challenge of modernity by retreating to the secure haven of the sacred texts. They placed such strong emphasis on the self-sufficiency of Islam that their viewpoint **(p.57)** bordered on arrogance, and the egalitarianism and anti-elitism they advocated was so extreme that rational enquiry and intellectualism were viewed as corruptions of the purity of Islam. A visible consequence of these conditions is the absence of a vibrant civil society based on reason and doubt and not on conviction and truth, which may explain the absence of world-class universities not only in Pakistan but also in the Muslim world.

Salafabism

The modern Islamic consciousness is a fusion of apologetics, Wahhabism, and Salafism, and has been labelled by Abou El Fadl as Salafabism. The characteristic features of Salafabism include the following:

1. A profound alienation from institutions of power in the modern world and from Islamic heritage and tradition.
2. A supremacist puritanism that compensates for feelings of defeatism, disempowerment, and alienation.
3. A belief in the self-sufficiency of Islamic doctrines and a sense of self-righteous arrogance vis-à-vis the 'other'.
4. The prevalence of patriarchal, misogynist, and exclusionary orientations, and an abnormal obsession with the seductive power of women.
5. The rejection of critical appraisals of Islamic traditions and Muslim discourses.
6. The denial of universal moral values and rejection of the indeterminacy of the modern world.
7. Use of Islamic texts as the supreme regulator of social life and society.
8. Literalist, anti-rational, and anti-interpretive approaches to religious texts.

Salafabism has anchored itself in the security of Islamic texts. These texts are also exploited by a select class of readers to affirm their reactionary power. Unlike apologists who sought to prove Islam's *compatibility* with Western institutions, Salafabists define Islam as the antithesis of the West. They argue that colonialism ingrained in **(p.58)** Muslims a lack of self-pride and feelings of inferiority. For Salafabists, there are only two paths in life: the path of God (the straight path) and the path of Satan (the crooked path). The straight path is anchored in divine law, which is to be obeyed and which is never to be argued with, diluted, or denied through the application of humanistic or philosophical discourses. Salafabists argue that, by attempting to integrate and co-opt

Western ideas such as feminism, democracy, or human rights, Muslims have deviated from the straight to the crooked path.

In arguing thus, they exaggerate the role of the texts and minimize the role of the human agent who interprets them. In the Salafabist paradigm, the subjectivities of the interpreting agents are irrelevant to the realization and implementation of the divine commands contained in the text. In this paradigm, such public interests as protecting society from the sexual lure of women can be verified empirically and must be protected. In contrast, moral, ethical, and aesthetic judgements about human dignity, love, mercy, and compassion—qualities that cannot be quantified empirically—must be ignored.

Like most theological orientations, Salafabism manifests itself in both moderate and extreme forms. Its moderate expressions can be found in such political movements as JI, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Malaysia's Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), and similar movements in various Muslim countries that are struggling for the establishment of an Islamic state; its extremist expressions are represented by such groups as al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The acts described at the beginning of this chapter are stark manifestations of a way of thinking among many Muslims that has come to value a superficial sense of independence, control, security, and power, regardless of the moral and social consequences. Colonialism, Islamic nationalism, the failure of the nationalist project, a woeful backwardness in science and technology, and a preponderance of oppressive authoritarian state structures have nurtured moral lethargy among the Muslim masses and given rise to Salafabism.

A Profile of Muslim Religious Consciousness in Pakistan

Table 3.1 provides a snapshot of how Islam is 'imagined' by Pakistani Muslims. The evidence is extracted from a survey of 1,185 Pakistani respondents for my multi-country study of Muslim religiosity, findings **(p.59)**

Table 3.1. Imagining Religion: A Portrait of Religious Consciousness in Pakistan

Text of statement	Pakistan	Global
What is required is a deeper appreciation of the essential principles implicit in the Quran and the Hadith, so that solutions to contemporary problems can be found	1.35	1.78
The ideal Muslim society must be based on the model of early Muslim society under the Prophet and the Kalifa-e-Rashdeen	1.37	2.15
It is a duty of the Muslims to strive to establish a truly Islamic society	1.38	1.84

Text of statement	Pakistan	Global
Muslim society must be based on the Quran and sharia law	1.38	1.88
The Quran and Sunnah contain all the essential religious and moral truths required by the whole human race from now until the end of time	1.44	1.7
The Quran and Sunnah are completely self-sufficient to meet the needs of present and future societies	1.45	1.82
Women should observe Islamic dress codes	1.48	1.89
Authentic human fulfilment depends upon the existence of conditions in society by which it is possible to pursue the divine will	1.5	2.09
Strict enforcement of punishment under Islamic law such as amputation of limbs for theft will significantly reduce crime	1.51	2.19
Any state will be imperfect unless it is based on moral values which are implicit in the sharia and also on belief in Allah as upholder of morality and justice	1.54	1.88
I believe society would be better off if it were run by people of explicit religious conviction, willing to act morally and politically on those convictions	1.54	1.89
Freedom should not mean licence to do anything one chooses in the name of self-fulfilment	1.54	1.86
Islamic laws about apostasy should be strictly enforced in Muslim countries	1.58	2.13
Islamic identity can only be preserved through faithful adherence to traditional Islamic beliefs and duties	1.6	2.25
Human nature is unchanging and this is the reason for Muslim scholars asserting the finality of rules and laws for human conduct which are expressed in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet	1.64	2.08
Charging interest on loans by banks should be strictly prohibited in Muslim countries	1.65	2.28
Many fundamentalists are educated and people who are genuinely concerned about the moral, social, political, and economic failures of their respective societies, and who believe that the answer lies in a return to religious values and lifestyle	1.91	2.34

Text of statement	Pakistan	Global
Women are sexually attractive, and segregation and veiling are necessary for male protection	1.93	2.27
If men are not in charge of women, women will lose sight of all human values and the family will disintegrate	2.3	2.51
It is not practical or realistic to base a complex modern society on the sharia law	3.81	3.5

Source: Riaz Hassan. 2008. *Inside Muslim Minds*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, pp. 50–53.

Notes: (i) The strength of agreement with the statement in the question is noted in column 2, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting 'strongly agree', in order of strength.

(ii) 'Global' in column 3 refers to the mean of Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Turkey.

(p.60) of which have been reported in my books, *Inside Muslim Minds*¹⁴ and *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*.¹⁵ In this survey the (p.61) respondents were given statements about the images of Islam (which included the statements in Table 3.1) and were asked to choose one of the following responses that came closest to their opinion: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'not sure', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree', and 'no answer'.

The evidence reported in Table 3.1 indicates a religious consciousness closely resembling Salafabist characteristics outlined above and displays very strong support for implementing 'Islamic law' in Pakistan. The purpose of human freedom is seen not as a means of personal fulfilment and growth, but as a way of meeting obligations and duties laid down in the sacred texts. The strong support for strict enforcement of apostasy laws makes any rational and critical appraisal of Islamic texts and traditions unacceptable and subject to the *hudd* punishment of death. The strength of these attitudes (see Table 3.2) could explain why *hudood* and blasphemy laws are supported, or at least tolerated, by a significant majority of Pakistanis.

Table 3.2. The Intensity of Religious Consciousness in Pakistan by Gender, Age, and Education Level

	Mean	Level of intensity
Gender		
Male	1.69	Very strong
Female	1.74	Very strong

	Mean	Level of intensity
Age		
25 or younger	1.61 [^]	Very strong
26-40	1.74	Very strong
41-55	1.67	Very strong
56 or older	1.82 [^]	Very strong
Education		
Less than high school	1.66	Very strong
High school	1.47*	Very strong
Professional or tertiary	1.73*	Very strong
Religious school	1.61	Very strong
Overall in Pakistan	1.66	Very strong

Source: Riaz Hassan. 2008. *Inside Muslim Minds*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, pp. 57-59.

Notes: (i) A very strong intensity is defined as a mean score of < 1.95.

(ii) [^] and * indicate that the mean difference between the categories is significant at the 0.05 level.

(p.62) The evidence also shows that misogynist and patriarchal attitudes are deeply entrenched in the modern Muslim consciousness. There is strong support for exclusionary practices with regard to women. The evidence suggests strong misogynist and patriarchal attitudes and an abnormal level of obsession with the sexual allure of women, whereby women are seen as sexually provocative and must be segregated to avoid provoking men. Such views raise interesting questions about the Muslim male's attitude towards controlling his own sexuality. They suggest that men cannot be held responsible for acts of sexual misconduct, as any such behaviour must have been provoked by the women concerned; they would never have indulged in such behaviour otherwise. Such views are demeaning and insulting not only to women but also to men themselves. Analysis of the survey data also revealed that male respondents were significantly more likely to have a stronger Salafabist religious consciousness than women. There were no uniform correlations between a strong Salafabist religious consciousness and gender, age, and education levels.

In this chapter, I have attempted to offer an analysis of what I have called a crisis of conscience in Pakistan. The main issue explored is why and how the followers of Islam, whose sacred text exhorts its followers to establish a social order that is just and ethically based and places great emphasis on the values of justice, mercy, compassion, and charity, passively or actively tolerate laws whose implementation subjects many Pakistanis, especially women and minorities, to acts of humiliation and cruelty. And why is there widespread support for misogynist practices and attitudes? I have argued that such practices coexist with ubiquitous acts of compassion, charity, and concern for the welfare of their fellow citizens. This exploration has used the notion of religious consciousness to offer an explanation for this crisis of conscience. Religious consciousness is a symbolic discourse that gives expression to deeply held religious beliefs. A product of interpretive communities, it provides the convictions and ideals that act as primary texts for indexing social reality. By way of explanation I have argued that a hybrid religious consciousness—Salafabism—has gained considerable influence at cognitive and behavioural levels among Pakistani Muslims.

(p.63) The key characteristics of Salafabism are an intense belief in the self-sufficiency of Islamic texts and an attitude towards them that is literalist, anti-rational, and anti-interpretive. Religious texts are seen not as moral and religious guides, but as a secure refuge for an intellect that is unable to confront the challenges posed by modernity and is, by and large, hostile to them. Such a mindset can be characterized as self-righteous, arrogant, supremacist, and puritan. It compensates for the feeling of alienation and powerlessness arising from the general economic, social, political, and technological backwardness. It is further characterized by strong patriarchal and misogynist attitudes that deny Muslim women equality of citizenship, indicate an obsession with the sexual allure of women, and pose important questions about the sexuality and insecurities of Muslim men.

This Salafabist strand of modern Muslim consciousness can be seen as a product of the historical experience of Muslims over the past three centuries. Large-scale social and political factors have played an important role in shaping it and might also explain the variations in its intensity in different countries.

Understanding it is essential to an understanding of the acts described at the beginning of this chapter. Will today's Pakistanis be able to take up the challenge of marginalizing Salafabism, or will they be overwhelmed by it and, in the process, be marginalized themselves? This is probably the most pressing challenge facing Pakistani intellectuals, state, and society today.

Notes:

⁽¹⁾ Inayatullah. 1997. *State and Democracy in Pakistan*. Lahore: Vanguard Books; Anwar Hussain Syed. 1982. *Pakistan: Islam, Politics, and National Solidarity*.

New York: Praeger; Leonard Binder. 1961. *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

(²) Fazlur Rahman. 1989. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica.

(³) Hassan Abbas. 2005. *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War Terror*. New York: M.E. Sharpe; Riaz Hassan. 1985. 'Islamization: An Analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 21(3): 263–84.

(⁴) In December 1979 and January 1980, I interviewed some of the leading figures in General Zia ul-Haq's government about the Islamization programme. One of them was Lieutenant General Faiz Ali Chisti, a close ally of General Zia and Minister of Manpower in his government. The following is a summary of the observations General Chisti made about the aims of the government's Islamization policies:

(1.) Pakistan was created as an ideological state—the ideology was Islam, the government wants to ensure that Pakistan remains an ideological state.

(2.) Through Islamization we are trying to instil in our people 'norms of Islamic life and norms of Islam'.

(3.) Of all the Muslim states today nowhere, not even in Saudi Arabia, is there a polity based on the precepts of Islam.

(4.) We are the only country striving to establish a Muslim society; we are therefore a test case and 'we cannot afford to fail—we must succeed'.

(5.) 'Total indiscipline' and '*badikhlaqi*' (bad morals) characterized Pakistani society before the army takeover; there was indiscipline among students, among labourers, and so on. Increasing '*badikhlaqi*' and secularism causes disruptions of relations between men and women, husband and wife, parents and children, and students and teachers. All that has to stop.

(6.) In the West, they kill thousands upon thousands of 'babies' through abortion (which is killing of life) and we here kill a few adults to reform society.

(7.) No one is a friend of Islam—Christians, Jews, and Hindus all are against us, we need to build a strong society based on Islam to protect ourselves.

(8.) Islam also has produced more traitors per capita than any other religion; we need to be vigilant.

(⁵) S.V.R. Nasr. 2002. 'Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?*. London: Zed Books, pp. 85–114.

(⁶) Nasr, 'Islam'; Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift*; Riaz Hassan. 2010. *Life as a Weapon: The Global Rise of Suicide Bombings*. London and New York: Routledge.

(⁷) Nasr, 'Islam'; S. Jamal Malik. 1989. 'Islamization in Pakistan 1977-1985: The Ulama and Their Places of Learning', *Islamic Studies*, 28(1): 5-28; Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift*.

(⁸) Nasr, 'Islam', p. 90.

(⁹) Kiran Hassan. 2011. 'Blasphemy, the Media, and Governor Taseer's Murder', *South Asian Journal*, 32(1): 64-70.

(¹⁰) Ali, Rabia. 2001. *The Dark Side of Honour*, Lahore: Shirkat Gah, p.32

(¹¹) Muhammad Tufail Hashmi. 2004. *Hudood Ordinances* (in Urdu). Lahore: Aurat Foundation.

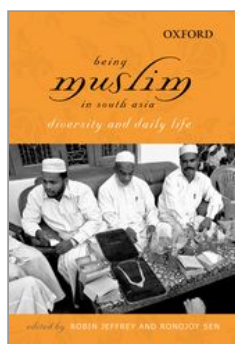
(¹²) Khaled Abou El Fadl. 2001. *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications; Khaled Abou El Fadl. 2001. 'Islam and the Theology of Power', *Middle East Report*, 221(Winter); Khaled Abou El Fadl. 2003. 'The Ugly Modern and the Modern Ugly: Reclaiming the Beautiful in Islam', in Omid Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, pp. 33-77.

(¹³) Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*; Abou El Fadl, 'Islam and the Theology of Power'; Abou El Fadl, 'Ugly Modern and Modern Ugly'; Rahman, *Major Themes*; Fazlur Rahman. 1982. *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(¹⁴) Riaz Hassan. 2008. *Inside Muslim Minds*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

(¹⁵) Riaz Hassan. 2002. *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

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The Challenges of Diversity

'Casting' Muslim Communities in South India*

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Abstract and Keywords

The southernmost regions of India present an almost paradoxical situation as far as Muslims are concerned. While the impact of Islam and Muslims on the region is often considered insignificant, Muslim societies in south India exhibit historical, economic, religious, and linguistic diversity far beyond that encountered in regions associated more centrally with Islam in South Asia such as the Punjab and the Gangetic Plains or Bengal. From the colonial period onwards, administrators, historians, and anthropologists have tried to come to terms with this complexity by reducing south Indian Muslims to a set of bounded and demarcated 'communities' supposedly sharing common language, origins, economic pursuits, and religious particularities. This chapter challenges and contextualizes established images of Muslim societies in south India. It endeavours to understand Muslim diversity in the region as a dynamic and complex interplay of diverse processes.

Keywords: south India, definitions of community, diversity among Muslims, community formation

Muslim societies of south India remain at the margins of our understanding of Muslim South Asia. This is not to say that no research has been done regarding these communities, but this research has hardly had any impact on the way Muslim societies in South Asia have been described as a whole. At best, it has received token nods, a record of exceptional cases which cannot be integrated into a general picture based on events elsewhere in South Asia. At worst, it has been ignored. Many still seem to believe that the Muslim communities of south

India are plainly unimportant for the grand narrative of Islam **(p.65)** in South Asia—too small, too exceptional, or, in a paradoxical inversion, not exceptional enough. Yet the responsibility to address this situation squarely lies with those engaged in studying and analysing these societies. Far too often, the questions we ask are based on models and theories developed with regard to Muslim societies of northern South Asia. Once this is done, the only possible ‘answers’ we can give is that either our south Indian cases are sharply and essentially different from or similar and dependent on the situation in north India. And indeed, more often than not, both answers need to be given, for notwithstanding the relatively small size of Muslim societies in India’s extreme south, there is a great degree of diversity within and between these societies. Under these circumstances, bringing Muslim societies of south India into the limelight seems to be doomed from the outset. And yet, scholarship cannot afford to ignore a part of Muslim South Asia that, from the admittedly reductionist perspective of statistics, seems to present a striking contrast to Muslim societies in north India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. While Muslims in South Asia are more often than not identified with poverty, low levels of education, and strained relationships with their non-Muslim neighbours, South Indian Muslims have long been identified with relative affluence, high literacy rates, and a great degree of identification with ‘south Indian culture’. Simplistic as this image is, anyone interested in challenging negative stereotypes of South Asian Muslims can hardly afford to ignore south India.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the way that the assimilation of diversity and difference among south Indian Muslims to models derived from the north has prevented scholars and policymakers from gaining fresh perspectives on problems facing Indian Muslims elsewhere in the country. For this purpose, the chapter will focus on a particular section of south Indian Muslims, namely, those whose mother tongue is Tamil and who are located primarily in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. The common understanding of Tamil Muslim society encountered both in popular and scholarly narratives is that of a ‘community’ divided into several ‘sub-communities’ that function somewhat like ‘Muslim castes’.¹ Each of these ‘sub-communities’ is **(p.66)** defined by a set of common traits which in turn go back to a single, identifiable historical process that brought the respective ‘sub-community’ into being. In the first part of this chapter, I will dispute this claim of clearly identifiable ‘sub-communities’ and suggest that this master narrative of Tamil Muslim society is the result of a process of defining Tamil Muslim communities by colonial census ethnography along the lines of Hindu castes. By ‘casting’ Muslim society in south India, the great diversity of Muslim societies in the region could be reduced and assimilated to colonial views of Indian Muslims developed elsewhere in British India. In the second part, I will discuss how the adoption of the common narrative by local actors, scholarship, and the postcolonial state has resulted in what appears at a superficial level to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, the emergence of self-identifying

‘sub-communities’ among Tamil Muslims. Upon a closer look, however, the contradictions between different understandings of terminologies and historical narratives are hardly resolved.

‘Casting’ Community and Reducing Diversity

Any account of Muslim societies in south India, whether historical or anthropological, usually starts with the assumption that Muslims in south India are part of a set of clearly defined, discrete communities, which are mutually distinguished by features such as class, occupation, adherence to different law schools, and language. Most importantly, these communities are believed to have arisen from what are considered to be particular historical processes (which often are supposed to have supplied them with names and origin myths). The defining features of these communities are a direct result of the processes which led to their formation. Muslim communities are thus in a sense the fossilized remains of past processes of identity formation. **(p.67)** Diversity, according to this model, is the product of the petrification of history.

Probably the most often discussed, applied, and reassembled set of south Indian Muslim communities is that which is assumed to divide up those Muslims claiming Tamil as their household language. While different authors often present slightly different systems of dividing Tamil-speaking Muslims into different communities²—the first sign that the model is not quite as convincing as it is presented—there seems to be a general consensus to distinguish at least three ‘communities’, the Maraikkāyars, the Rāvuttars (or Rowthers), and the Lebbais (or Labbais).³ Generally, the Maraikkāyars are assumed to have descended from the union of Arab merchants with local women, to belong to the Shafi’i law school, to be businessmen and merchants, mostly settled on the coast, and generally imagined to command a superior status in Tamil Muslim society. The Rāvuttars are considered to have arisen as the result of the various ‘Muslim’ conquests of south India, to belong to the Hanafi law school, to be engaged in small-scale trade and various artisanal activities, living mostly in the southern inland of Tamil Nadu, and believed to occupy a lower social position. The Lebbais, finally, are in many respects considered similar to the Rāvuttars, though they are more strongly identified with the northern inland and some authors accept that there are Shafi’i Lebbais.

This basic template has served both historians and anthropologists to describe Muslim society in south India and to deal with the diversity of that society. Yet if one looks carefully at the way this template has been used, it should be obvious that this procedure is highly fraught. Most historians readily assume that the communities identified above **(p.68)** existed in the past in pretty much the same way as they are supposed to exist nowadays. The main evidence is the use of terms such as *maraikkāyar* in various sources, most commonly as part of a person’s name. The usual assumption is that a person called *maraikkāyar* belonged to the Maraikkāyar community and exhibited the traits associated with

that community. But the fundamental problem is that this interpretation usually cannot be verified from the record itself. A harbour list noting a Muslim captain or merchant whose name includes terms such as *maraikkāyar* or *lebbai* normally does not tell us which law school such individuals belonged to, or whether they claimed descent from Arab traders, or any other such details. Indeed, it does not even tell us whether the person in question saw that term as an indicator of a community identity at all. A survey of the actual use of titles such as *maraikkāyar* in historical sources immediately reveals a multitude of problems. Sometimes, titles of what are considered distinct communities are found in the names of the same individuals.⁴ Indeed, once one leaves the paper trail left behind by the clerks of European trading companies, the use of the titles becomes strikingly rare. In Islamic Tamil poetry, only the term *lebbai* occurs with fair frequency. Despite the fact that the production of this literature is usually associated with the Maraikkāyar community, this particular title is exceptional prior to the nineteenth century—it occurs once in a poem dating to 1590, and in two anonymous poems purportedly dating to the late seventeenth century ('Ceytakkāti nontinātakam', 171, 179, 182;⁵ 'Ceytakkāti tirumanavālttu', 355;⁶ 'Mikurācu mālai', 23⁷). **(p.69)** The term *rāvuttar* does not to my knowledge occur in this literature prior to the late eighteenth century at all, though it is occasionally found in inscriptions.⁸ In general, the terms occur as part of the names and titles of individuals in both Tamil and European sources. Use of the terms in the collective sense is rare. I am aware of only two inscriptions in which the term *maraikkāyar* or *marakkālarāyar* is used as collective.⁹ Similarly, there is no mention of the existence of clearly defined 'communities' in European sources prior to the late nineteenth century either.

Given this situation, where does the standard template used by scholars of all disciplines come from? The answer is simple: it is the product of British colonial census ethnography, and more specifically, Edgar Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* of 1909.¹⁰ The latter work distilled information gathered from district manuals, gazetteers, census reports, and other sources into more or less the picture that scholars apply to their sources nowadays. I say 'more or less', because British census ethnography is still clearly more heterogeneous than the standard template employed by contemporary scholarship.¹¹ Nevertheless, given that Thurston had to define Muslim communities in order to include them in a catalogue of 'castes' and 'tribes', it is not surprising if the Muslim groups mentioned in his work share many characteristics with Hindu castes.

(p.70) A good example of how Muslim communities came to be defined by Thurston is provided by the term *lebbai*. As I have noted in an earlier essay, this term clearly originated as something like the 'Malayo-Tamil' equivalent of the north Indian 'mullah'. This is borne out by the use of the term in early Tamil Islamic literature, European sources, the meaning of the cognate forms of the term in south-east Asian languages, and the fact that *lebbai* still refers to a minor religious official in southern and parts of coastal Tamil Nadu as well as in

Sri Lanka.¹² In the nineteenth century, British administrators came to use *lebbai* as shorthand for any Tamil-speaking Muslim, in a sense as the Coromandel equivalent of the Malabar Mappila. This use of the term seems to have originated among Urdu speakers, from whom the British administrators in the Madras Presidency drew most of their information on Muslim societies in south India.¹³ The view common today that ‘the Lebbais’ form a community of Muslims distinct from other Tamil-speaking Muslims seems for the first time to have been voiced in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁴ That this notion was ultimately adopted by the majority of scholars appears mainly to be due to Thurston, who introduces his entry on ‘Labbai’ by a quote from the *Madras Census Report* of 1901 claiming that the members of this community ‘seem to be distinct from the Marakkāyars’.¹⁵ Paradoxically, Thurston follows this up with information and quotation **(p.71)** culled from other works which use the term *lebbai* as an umbrella term for all Tamil-speaking Muslims. In doing so, Thurston actually demonstrates the same fallacy that has plagued scholarship using the term ever since: rather than attempting to understand the term in the context of each source, he imbued occurrences of the term with a meaning that was never there in the first place. Though it is not possible to go into the details here, I believe that similar things could be stated about the terms *maraiikkāyar* and *rāvuttar*. The way these terms are commonly understood usually owes very little to the contexts in which scholars encounter them, and much to Thurston and a few other census ethnographers who defined Muslim ‘castes’ for the sake of colonial administration.

Homogenizing this collage of different meanings of the term *lebbai* and reading the distilled meaning into either past or present uses of the term is obviously a dangerous exercise, but one all too often encountered in contemporary studies. A lot has been written in recent years concerning the construction of communities in British India.¹⁶ Scholarship needs to reflect on this heritage and to try to free itself from its colonial legacy. If this is not done, we risk seeing things in our sources which are actually absent from them, while overlooking the dynamics which gave meaning to terms such as *lebbai* or *maraiikkāyar*, as well as to a host of other terms usually disregarded because they did not find a place in colonial census ethnography. The challenge in getting away from the standard model of explaining difference and diversity among south Indian Muslims in terms of distinct communities lies in thoroughly historicizing that diversity. To doubt the existence of stable, clearly defined communities across space and time should not mean to doubt the reality of the processes which supposedly **(p.72)** went into their making; that would mean to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather, we need to acknowledge the dynamic nature of these processes, which changed according to the context. A good example is provided by the claims to ‘Arab’ descent brought forward nowadays by various sections of Tamil Muslim society, most notably those self-identifying as Maraiikkāyars.

According to the common version of this story, the elite groups among Tamil-speaking Muslims are descended from Arab traders who settled on the Coromandel Coast and married local women. There is of course little doubt that Arabs, much as Muslims of many other ethnic origins, at times did settle in the trading ports of the Coromandel Coast, much as Coromandel traders themselves settled in other parts of the Indian Ocean and intermingled with the Muslim and non-Muslim populations of these places. Yet it is important to stress two elements inherent in this common origin myth for which the sources do not account. First, the common account assumes that there was a sort of foundational 'Arab settlement', a more or less single event rather than a continuous process. Second, this 'settlement' is assumed to have given rise to a homogenous 'community' with a clear-cut identity, origin myth, and a consciousness of ethnic difference. But in contrast, the sources present us with an image of this process which is continuous and individual rather than foundational and communal. In the vast majority of cases, we are actually faced with claims by elite members of south Indian Muslim society of descent from the Prophet Muhammad or one of his close companions. On the contrary, neither the place of origin nor any ethnic or communal identity figures prominently in pre-nineteenth century records.

That any notion of 'Arabness' was absent from origin myths and genealogies of the pre-nineteenth century period is perhaps best illustrated by a copper-plate inscription from Kayalpattinam, which claims to date from the ninth century, though several elements in the inscription make it clear that it can hardly be older than about 1,500 (and possibly much younger).¹⁷ This inscription records the migration of four 'lineages' (*vamcam*) from Cairo to Kayalpattinam—these lineages comprise descendants of the Prophet and 'Ali', and the (p.73) descendants of the first caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar' and 'Uthman', as well as 16 soldiers and three barbers, together with their wives and slaves—all of whom are together called *marakkālarāyar* because they arrived in Kayalpattinam by ship. While descent from the Prophet and his companions and a geographical origin in the Middle East is highlighted, there is no hint of any ethnic consciousness as descendants of 'Arabs', nor of any feeling of 'community' with the elites of other coastal towns. Being descended from the Prophet or one of the early caliphs constructed individuals as carriers of *baraka* or 'blessing', that made it possible for God to work miracles through that person. The reputation of such individuals was therefore primarily based on miraculous powers. The character of Syedna Mohammadu Mustafa Imbichi Koya Thangal in Thoppil Mohammed Meeran's novel *The Story of a Seaside Village* is a perfect example of such an individual, who is respected and feared for his powers, but at the same time isolated in the village and still dependent on the goodwill of the village headman.¹⁸

The claim of certain south Indian Muslims to be descended from ethnic 'Arabs', rather than from important personalities of early Islam, first becomes prominent in the peculiar context of British colonial sources. The root of this narrative seems to lie in Wilks' *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, published between 1810 and 1817.¹⁹ In this work, both the 'Nevayets' of the Konkan as well as the 'Lubbè' of the Coromandel Coast are described as descendants of 'the house of Hâshem'.²⁰ But the 'Lubbè's' claims to Middle Eastern origins are cast into doubt on account of their 'black complexion', which they 'attribute to intermarriage with the natives; but the Nevayets affirm that the Lubbè are the descendants of their domestic slaves; and there is certainly ... a strong resemblance to the natives of Abyssinia'.²¹ This rather incredible account of all Coromandel Muslims being **(p.74)** descended from Ethiopian slaves obviously served the interests of both the west-coast 'Nevayets' as well as the racial sensibilities of the British colonial officer, who vouched for the trustworthiness of the 'Nevayets' by claiming that they 'preserved the purity of their original blood by systematically avoiding intermarriage with the Indians'.²² Consequently, 'even at this time there are some Nevayets whose complexions approach the European freshness'.²³ While still preserving the claim to be descended not from 'Arabs' per se but from the Prophet's family, Wilks' narrative expands its native sources by two important aspects: it is not concerned with the origins of individual families and lineages, but with larger populations, and 'race' becomes the central factor in determining the validity of origin myths.

It is this narrative which all further British census ethnography, and much of modern scholarship, elaborates upon. What began as individualized claims of elite south Indian Muslims to a distinguished ancestry was transformed into a history of 'race', 'caste', and 'intermarriage' in the peculiar conjunction of late Mughal and British imperial narratives. In the standard account, the fanciful derivation of all Coromandel Muslims from Arabs was limited again to only a specific section of that society, the Maraikkāyars. While this gave those identified as Maraikkāyars the capacity to defend their elite status in local society, it also marked them as fundamentally inferior to the Urdu-speaking Muslims of south India. For while those who claimed Arab ancestry clearly envisioned this as a noble trait, they remained, in the official view, of 'mixed blood', while the Urdu-speaking 'Ashraf' were considered 'pure-blooded',²⁴ no matter how 'mixed' their actual heritage might be (just consider the Turco-Mongol-north Indian ancestry of the Mughal royal house). The claim to 'Arab' descent thus developed in the Tamil regions of south India in the context of a political struggle of certain elite sections of Tamil-speaking Muslims against both the aspirations of non-elite sections of their own societies and the claims to the superior status of Urdu-speaking Muslims by the fading elites of the Mughal order and their British successors. Across the Palk Strait in Ceylon, however, where Urdu-speaking groups did not challenge the claims to Arab descent **(p. 75)** made by local Muslims, a different development took place. Here, the claim

that all Ceylonese Muslims were descendants of Arabs was deployed by Muslim elites against the claims of Hindu and Christian representatives of the Tamils. The sense of separation between 'Moors' and 'Tamils' fostered thereby benefitted not only the Muslim elites, but ultimately also the Sinhala-dominated independent state of Sri Lanka.²⁵ Notions of descent, origin, and history among Muslims in the far south thus unsurprisingly differ across both time and space.

The example of the historical contingency of claims to 'Arab' descent among Muslims on the Coromandel Coast throws another reductionist element in the standard accounts of south Indian Muslim society into focus. As British administrators and census ethnographers drew heavily on the former elites of Mughal successor states in constructing their idea of 'Mussalmans' in India, while local Muslims reacted to this particular construct by claiming foreign origins for themselves, a peculiar pattern arose which helped domesticate what was a highly diverse social landscape to a model propagated by a relatively small elite. As different as the particular set-up of 'communities' in the standard accounts of south Indian Muslim society may have been, they actually followed the same pattern as the northern distinction into *ashraf* and *ajlaf* in the assumption that Muslim elites in South Asia are as a rule of 'foreign' origin, while local Indian 'converts' generally form the lower rungs of Muslim society in South Asia. Assuming that Muslim societies in the extreme south were organized according to the same patterns as those further north allowed their actual diversity to be effaced in the idea of a homogenous 'Indian Islam', a notion which proved convenient for British administrators, (Urdu-speaking) Muslim politicians, and, as we shall see, contemporary historians and social scientists alike.

The Contradictions of the Present

If even a preliminary skimming of the historical archive reveals the ambiguity and diversity of actual social practice in the past and the **(p.76)** weakness of a paradigm built on colonial ethnography, postcolonial realities need to be interrogated as well. After all, the ubiquity of Thurston's categories in historical investigations has its root in both contemporary usages and contemporary scholarship. Many historians have drawn not only on Thurston himself, but also on contemporary accounts by anthropologists and 'community' publications which seemed to confirm colonial census ethnography. We may ask ourselves what relationship, if any, exists between colonial imagery and postcolonial reality? And what does that link mean for the way Muslim society in south-east India continues to be understood by laymen, scholars, and politicians alike?

Despite the ubiquity of the paradigmatic triad Lebbai-Rāvuttar-Maraikkāyar in studies of contemporary Muslim society in Tamil Nadu, a closer look actually reveals a picture which is about as 'messy' as that provided by pre-colonial sources. Again, what has been written about the Lebbais in the last 40 years from an anthropological perspective provides perhaps the best example for this.

Writing in 1978, Jacob Pandian noted the wide variety of the use of the term *lebbai* in different parts of the Tamil country.²⁶ Addressing specifically the situation in the town of Pulicat, he described a situation where the elites of Pulicat, who claimed descent from Arab traders, self-identified as 'Labbais' while denying that label to non-elite Tamil-speaking Muslims of the town. The latter seem not to have had a single label of self-designation, since Pandian simply dubs them 'non-Labbais'.²⁷ To complicate matters, Pandian quotes an Arabic-Tamil account of the history of Pulicat's 'Labbai' elites in which the latter not only claimed descent from Arab settlers, who reached Pulicat via Kayalpattinam, but actually laid claim to the title *maraikkāyar* as well.²⁸ A little earlier than Pandian, Mattison Mines described the situation in Pallavaram, a suburb of Chennai, as closely conforming to the idea of the 'Labbais' as a distinct community of the Hanafi law school, less enterprising than other Tamil-speaking Muslims and more inclined to shift linguistically to Urdu, though he denied any fixed ranking among different (p.77) communities.²⁹ A bit to the west of Chennai, in the tannery belt of the Palar river valley around Vellore, Kalam depicted 'Labbais' as a community of Muslims who traditionally spoke Tamil and belonged to the Shafi'i law school, yet he goes on to state that the 'Labbais' actually consisted of three subdivisions, namely 'Rowthers', 'Maraikars', and 'Kayalars'. He also notes that in recent years, these 'Labbais' have begun to shift towards Urdu and the Hanafi law school.³⁰

These observations from northern Tamil Nadu can be contrasted to accounts based on the extreme south: modern-day Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts. Frank Fanselow did not report any community self-identifying as Lebbais in the towns of Kalakkad and Kayalpattinam where he did fieldwork.³¹ In a more general paper, he basically denied the existence of any separate Lebbai community. Noting the origin of the term as a religious title and as a census category used to label all Tamil-speaking Muslims in the colonial period, he posited that *lebbai*, as a term, rather than designating a separate community, actually refers to economically disadvantaged, low-ranking religious officials which 'traditionally form a semi-endogamous sub-group' within larger communities such as Rāvuttar and Maraikkāyar.³² In curious contrast, Soumhya Venkatesan, writing about the town of Pattamadai, located less than 20 kilometres from Kalakkad where Fanselow did fieldwork, did encounter a clear concept of 'Labbais' forming a community separate from 'Rauthers'.³³ 'Labbais' in Pattamadai were conceded to be lower in socio-economic status, though there was apparently (p.78) no consensus in how far this was to be translated into more static conceptions of rank between the two communities. Venkatesan noted that the 'Labbais' were closely associated with officiating in rituals. As such, she seems to be inclined to harmonize her findings with those of Fanselow by suggesting that Pattamadai's 'Labbais' had become a sort of sub-community within a larger Muslim community in town due to their precarious economic position as ritual specialists.³⁴

Some experiences and communications I have had with Tamil Muslims in India and Singapore may further complicate this already intricate picture. In Parangipettai (Porto Novo), about 200 kilometres south of Chennai on the coast, several self-identifying Maraikkāyars flatly denied that the term *lebbai* referred to anything but a religious office. Persistent questioning from my side only brought the concession that ‘recently some people may have started calling themselves thus’. In contrast, a self-identified Rāvuttar from a village near Kumbakonam, but resident in Singapore, identified Lebbais as one of three Tamil Muslim communities. But the Lebbais were an afterthought after he had first claimed that there were only two communities, Maraikkāyars and Rāvuttars. Again, he identified Lebbais as religious specialists. A self-identified Lebbai from Tiruchirappalli had a far clearer vision of the centrality of her community among Tamil Muslims. According to her, the Maraikkāyars were ‘Muslim Brahmins’, people who violated Islam’s egalitarian ethos by claiming a higher rank, while Rāvuttar supposedly followed so many ‘un-Islamic’ customs that they could hardly be called Muslims at all. She therefore concluded that Lebbais were the only ‘real Muslim’ community among Tamil speakers.

Perhaps the most interesting case relates to the town of Kadayanallur in Tirunelveli district, traditionally a weaving town similar to the towns described by Fanselow and Venkatesan. Members of the sizable Kadayanallurian diaspora in Singapore told their version of how society in Kadayanallur had been divided in the early twentieth century. According to this version, the local Shafi’i community traced itself to one of two brothers by the name of Lebbai and Tarakanar (‘broker’). There were therefore Lebbai families and Tarakanar families. My Singaporean friends were unsure how far these groups were endogamous, though one of them remembered that his mother, a Lebbai, had **(p.79)** insisted that he should marry another Lebbai girl. What these respondents were sure about, however, was that being from either Lebbai or Tarakanar families did not impact the occupation of an individual. A Lebbai man could work as a broker (*tarakanar*) in the handloom industry, and a Tarakanar might supplement his income by officiating as a *lebbai* in rituals. Nor were these two groups the main social divisions in Kadayanallur. These were rather so-called ‘factions’ (*katci*) which professed allegiance to different holy men settled in Kerala and which were each composed of both Lebbais and Tarakanars.

Let us ponder the question of what to make of these divergent accounts. Obviously, there is much in this that seems to tally with information from pre-colonial and colonial sources. The use of *lebbai* as a blanket category for all Tamil-speaking Muslims as reported by Kalam tellingly comes from an area where Tamil-speaking Muslims are in close interaction with Urdu speakers, who may have been the first to dub all Tamil-speaking Muslims ‘Lebbai’. In contrast, the further one shifts away from the centres of *nawabi* and British power in northern Tamil Nadu, the more pronounced the connection between Lebbais and religious service provision becomes. One might thus start to construct historical

genealogies for the way a term is utilized in one town by sifting through the various uses of the term *lebbai* in historical sources and aligning these uses with the way a term is used in a given present-day context. A good example for a critical use of historical material and contemporary anthropological accounts is given by Venkatesan.³⁵ Venkatesan carefully compares various recorded understandings of Lebbais and compares them to the situation she encountered in Pattamadai as well as critically contrasting them to the colonial record. This procedure can certainly produce interesting results and enhance one's understanding of local dynamics, but it tends to ignore a vital aspect: the way that the contemporary situation may not just be a particular instantiation of one or the other past trajectory revealed in historical sources, but is actually shaped by these sources through their use in contemporary discourse itself.

To illustrate this point, let me recount an incident which happened in early 2005. I was having a conversation with a friend in Melapalayam about the involvement of this town in the colonial **(p.80)** trade in cloth with the Straits Settlements. After recounting a number of details about how the inhabitants of Melapalayam acted as brokers between inland weavers and merchants on the coast, my friend endorsed his account by stating that this information was to be found in an 'old book' in his father's possession. Interested to see this book, we went to his home, where the book turned out to be a recent reprint of Pate's 1917 gazetteer of Tinnevely district. This incident brought home to me that the many colonial (and some pre-colonial) accounts of the meaning of certain terms connected to Tamil Muslim 'communities' are not lying dormant in some dusty tomes, to be uncovered by historical research or at most utilized by the census administration of the postcolonial Indian state. These colonial accounts have long found their way into the general consciousness of Tamil Muslims through reprints or essays by historically interested individuals, where they are interpreted, reassembled, and redistributed to make sense of ever-changing social contexts. What much of contemporary scholarship tends to forget is that Tamil Nadu's Muslims are the exact opposite of the stereotyped image of a largely illiterate community which inhabits so many general accounts of Muslims in India. According to the census of 2001, male literacy among Muslims in Tamil Nadu stood at 89.7 per cent, while 76.2 per cent of all Muslim women in the state were literate.³⁶ Under these circumstances, it is only to be expected that historical accounts are disseminated to a wider public and shape debates and practices about 'community' among Tamil Muslims.

One therefore needs to consider not only how a present-day context can be interpreted by drawing on historical accounts, but rather one needs to question how far these accounts have actually created this context. For example, how far did the image found in many colonial and postcolonial sources about Lebbais as a distinct, relatively low-ranking 'community' impact patterns of differentiation in a context such as Pattamadai? Was performing certain rituals always perceived as the activity of a particular community? Or did the dissemination of

particular ideas from colonial sources about a Lebbai community **(p.81)** increasingly lead some parts of Muslim society in Pattamadai to avoid performing those activities historically associated with being a Lebbai? The account given by my respondents from Singapore about the situation in Kadayanallur suggests that in that town, 'being' a Lebbai and 'doing the job' of a Lebbai was perceived as two different things in the past. The tendency of scholarship to approach contemporary community formation by searching for explanations in what appears to be the past of these communities rather than their present is bound to be picked up and utilized in current debates.

One aspect of colonial discourse as well as scholarly discussion, which has certainly impacted the way that images of community are constructed among Muslims in contemporary Tamil Nadu, is the idea of the 'foreign' origin of certain 'communities'. While account after account may bolster, illustrate, contest, or negate the specific claims of a particular group, or even doubt the actual legitimacy of those claims as 'un-Islamic', what is practically never doubted among either scholars or laymen alike is that such claims were actually central to community formation in the pre-colonial past. As a result, ever-new claims and counterclaims are churned out on a regular basis, coming up with ever new inflections of this theme, such as new etymologies which try to derive the term *maraikkāyar* not from the word *marakkalam*, 'ship', anymore, but from the Moroccan city of Marrakech.³⁷ Recently, an idea seems to be gaining acceptance among some self-identifying Rāvuttars that they are not, as the colonial accounts claim, locals converted to Islam by the armies of north India's Turkish sultanates, but actual Turks who remained behind in south India. I have heard versions of this story from several sources, though I have not yet seen a printed statement concerning this. Yet others have shifted from the etymology of the term *rāvuttar* as 'cavalryman' to an image of Rāvuttars as horse traders, thereby constructing another line of argument for a Middle Eastern descent of this section of Tamil Muslims, as horses used to be imported from the Middle East.³⁸

(p.82) Such claims inevitably lead to counterclaims. Some of these counterclaims are voiced with an intention to challenge the assertions to superior status of a group or community which the claim for Middle Eastern ancestry often entails. Tamil nationalism has also viewed claims to foreign ancestry with suspicion, which is best exemplified in the case of Sri Lanka. The intertwining of Tamil-nationalist and Muslim-reformist discourses in the early twentieth century, with the accusation that traditionalist Muslim religious scholars were 'Muslim Brahmins',³⁹ has led some to accuse Muslim groups claiming foreign origins to be 'like Brahmins', as illustrated by the criticism voiced by a Lebbai woman from Tiruchirappalli which I referred to above.⁴⁰ Much as those claiming 'foreign' ancestry quote colonial accounts and historical scholarship to bolster their position, it is probably just a matter of time before claims such as that of historian J.B.P. More, who has recently declared that the

Maraikkāyars descended not from Arabs, but from Malabar-coast traders,⁴¹ are picked up by those challenging the status claims of Maraikkāyars.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the community discourse does not just result from local imperatives of class consciousness and identity politics. One reason why the identification as a specific 'community' plays such a great role among contemporary Tamil Muslims is that it resonates with the way both the state and central government formulate policies of development, amelioration of inequalities, and 'positive discrimination'. An important factor has been the peculiar model of affirmative action adopted by the Tamil Nadu state (p.83) government. While there is no separate reservation policy for Muslims in the state, almost all Muslims of Tamil Nadu (93.3 per cent in 2004–5)⁴² are considered to be Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This is primarily due to the dependence of the postcolonial state on colonial census ethnography. In the late nineteenth century, Lebbais were first classed as backward in the Madras Presidency, and this classification made it into the lists of OBCs developed by the postcolonial state.⁴³ The disparagement of the Lebbai in the sense of 'Tamil-speaking Muslim' by Urdu-speaking elites and the low socio-economic position of those who would take up work as a Lebbai in the sense of a religious specialist had reinforced an image of Lebbais as backward. The problem was that both colonial and postcolonial states obviously were confused about the multiple meanings of the term *lebbai*, which could variously refer to all Tamil-speaking Muslims, (a) particular Tamil Muslim community(s), a type of religious specialist, and an honorific title. While policies were probably intended to benefit a particular community, the fact that the term had been used for a long time to cover all Tamil-speaking Muslims enabled even the richest coastal merchants to identify themselves as Lebbai and thus to access the benefits provided by the OBC label. Fanselow reported that his respondents in Kalakkad identified officially as 'Lebbais', while among themselves, they used terms such as 'Tarakanar' or 'Rowther'.⁴⁴ Similarly, I was told by Rāvuttar and Maraikkāyar respondents in the Kaveri delta that they identified themselves as Lebbais to the state in order to gain benefits from the OBC category, although they did not consider themselves to be Lebbais.

On the pan-Indian level, the assumption that all Muslims in India are hierarchically organized into separate 'communities', with those claiming 'foreign' origins occupying the upper rungs of the social ladder, seems to supply the state and social scientists with a model that facilely allows them to assimilate diversity into recognizable patterns, even while perpetuating the racism of colonial census (p.84) ethnography. The so-called Sachar Committee Report claimed that systems of social stratification in which groups claiming foreign descent occupy the higher strata of society were to be found among Muslims all over India, and specifically identified Kerala and Andhra Pradesh as cases in point. That in the case of Andhra Pradesh, 'Labbaais' were listed as the descendants of Arab traders and local women does not seem to have caused any

discomfort when just four pages further on, the report identifies ‘Labbais’ as an OBC community in Tamil Nadu, even though OBCs are assumed by the report to not be of foreign origin. Neither did the authors of the report sense anything paradoxical in their statement that to be ‘Ashraf’, that is, in the terms of the committee, to be of either foreign origin or a high-caste convert, was equal to being ‘without any social disabilities’.⁴⁵ Given that the data presented in the report shows that Muslims in Tamil Nadu are not only easily the most ‘forward’ Muslim community in India, but actually show rather comfortable social indicators in comparison with most non-Muslim communities in Tamil Nadu as well, this should lead to the conclusion that Tamil Nadu has the highest number of ‘Ashraf’ Muslims—in direct contradiction to their classification as OBC.

Ultimately, any discussion of contemporary Muslim society in Tamil Nadu needs to include local, state, and pan-Indian perspectives to make sense of the internal contradictions that lead to ever-new inflections in social life and discourse among Tamil Muslims. But at the same time, the very contradictions between patterns of community discourses, social realities, and what is assumed to be the standard narrative of ‘Indian Muslim society’ also points to the problematic nature of the latter. There simply is no single ‘Indian Muslim society’, which is organized along the same lines, holding to the same values, or which faces the same problems. While few would subscribe to such a homogenized view of Indian Muslims, the tendency to perceive parallel Indian Muslim societies, which exhibit comparable structures and can then be addressed in a uniform manner, is ultimately only a variation of the notion of Indian Muslims as a homogenous block.

(p.85) ***

I have attempted to draw attention to the highly diverse and dynamic character of Tamil Muslim societies. My aim has been to demonstrate how the commonly presented model of Tamil and other Muslim societies in south India reduces this diversity and dynamics to a set of reified communities with static histories. Moreover, the ultimate structural origin of this model lies in the peculiar vision of Indian Muslim society constructed by British colonial administrators and late Mughal Muslim elites in the nineteenth century, a vision that was informed both by the racist assumptions of British census ethnography and the supremacist claims of late Mughal elites claiming foreign or at least north Indian ancestry. The result has been a model that makes Tamil Muslim societies doubly irrelevant to the study of Muslim societies in India as a whole. On the one hand, rather than showing an image of ‘diversity’, it produces ‘difference’, a difference that produces ‘communities’ as basically incomparable and irrelevant to each other. At the same time, as each ‘community’ is constructed on the basis of the same logic, whatever ‘parallel’ may be perceived actually turns out to be totally identical with the original model—and consequentially, irrelevant again, as there appears to be nothing new that can be learned from studying the divergent case.

Either Tamil Muslim societies appear irreducibly different from, or irreducibly identical to, the master narrative of South Asian Islam.

Yet even after the 'community template' has passed into Tamil Muslim societies through the intervention of individuals and the state, these societies have actually perpetuated earlier diversity, though now filtered through the lens offered by the model of differential, ranked communities. As discourses about history and identity are appropriated and deployed by various actors across and beyond Tamil Muslim communities, the whole range of factors which interrelate to produce various local inflections of these discourses becomes apparent. Micro-studies about how historical conditions, social class, the utilization of media, and the state have given rise to different configurations of community in Tamil Muslim societies are much needed. Once diversity in these contexts is not perceived as the effect of static historical and social formations confirming similarly static visions of Muslim societies elsewhere in India, but rather as the result of ongoing social (p.86) processes, which for various reasons have appropriated particular discourses about social difference, it will be possible to turn to the larger question of why Muslims in the Tamil south seem to have done so much better in terms of social indicators than their co-religionists in north India. Shifting the gaze, for once, from the relative deprivation to the relative success of Muslim minorities in India, may provide new means of ameliorating the disadvantages faced by Indian Muslims in other parts of India. It is therefore about time that scholars and laymen alike engage more seriously with the Muslim societies of Tamil Nadu and south India in general.

Notes:

(*) I thank Deepra Dandekar, University of Heidelberg, for her comments on this chapter.

⁽¹⁾ By this I do not intend to make any claim about whether there exists a 'caste system' among Tamil Muslims or not; the debates concerning this idea have been discussed and analysed in Frank S. Fanselow. 1996. 'The Disinvention of Caste among Tamil Muslims', in C.J. Fuller (ed.), *Caste Today*, pp. 202-26. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. What I intend to say is that the way Tamil Muslim '(sub-)communities' have been defined and classified according to ancestry, endogamy, occupation, and social status in scholarly and popular discourse parallels the construction of 'castes' in south Indian society.

⁽²⁾ A selection of views is discussed in Torsten Tschacher. 2001. 'Subgruppen tamilsprachiger Muslime Südindiens', in *Islam in Tamilnadu: Varia* (Sub-groups of Tamil-speaking Muslims in South India), Halle (Saale): Institut für Indologie und Südasiawissenschaften der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, pp. 73-108.

(³) There are many variant spellings of these terms and diverse understandings of their precise meanings. When referring to these terms as concepts, they are given with small initials and in italics. When referring to them as labels for ‘communities’, I use initial capitals and no italics. When discussing a particular author who uses a different spelling than the one adopted here, I put that spelling in inverted commas.

(⁴) Bhaswati Bhattacharya. 1999. ‘The Chulia Merchants of the Southern Coromandel in the Eighteenth Century: A Case for Continuity’, in Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (eds), *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500-1800*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 288.

(⁵) S. Muhammad Husayn Nainar (ed.). 1939. *Seyda-k-kādi nondi-nātakam* (Drama of the Cripple for Ceytakkāti) [A Tamil mono-drama]. Madras: University of Madras.

(⁶) Es.Em. Kamāl. 2000. *Centamil vallal cītakkāti* (Cītakkāti, Patron of Refined Tamil). Ramanathapuram: Carmilā Patippakam.

(⁷) Em.Ār.Em. Apturrahīm and Em.Ār.Em. Mukammatu Mustapā (eds). 1983. *Ālippulavar iyarriya mikurācu mālai* (The Ascension Garland). Chennai: Universal Publishers and Booksellers.

(⁸) Ce. Irācu (ed.). 2007. *Tamilaka islāmiya varalārru āvanankal* (Documents of the History of Islam in the Tamil Country). Erode: KSKS Kalvi Arakkattalai. See numbers 1, 44.1.

(⁹) Noboru Karashima. 2002. *A Concordance of Nāyakas: The Vijayanagar Inscriptions in South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 179 [no. 0752]; J. Raja Mohamad. 2004. *Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslims: A Socio-historical Study on the Tamil Muslims 1750-1900*. Chennai: Director of Museums, Government Museum, pp. 336-7.

(¹⁰) Edgar Thurston. 1909. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols. Madras: Government Press.

(¹¹) Perhaps the first text to arrive at what I have called the standard template is H. Bjerrum. 1920. ‘The Tamil Moslems of South India’, *The Moslem World*, 10(2): 172-5. For an impression of the heterogeneity of colonial administrative literature regarding ‘Tamil Muslim communities’, see Tschacher, ‘Subgruppen tamilsprachiger Muslime Südindiens’.

(¹²) See Torsten Tschacher. 2009. ‘Circulating Islam: Understanding Convergence and Divergence in the Islamic Traditions of Ma’bar and Nusantara’, in R. Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea (eds), *Islamic Connections:*

Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia, pp. 48–67, see 52–3. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the literature quoted there.

(¹³) Sylvia Vatuk. 2009. 'Islamic Learning at the College of Fort St George in Nineteenth-century Madras', in Thomas R. Trautmann (ed.), *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 48–73; also see Jaffur Shurreef. 1991 [1863]. *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Mussulmans of India; Comprising a Full and Exact Account of Their Various Rites and Ceremonies, from the Moment of Birth till the Hour of Death*. Translated by G.A. Herklots. Delhi and Madras: Asian Educational Services, p. 160.

(¹⁴) W. Francis. 1906. *South Arcot*. Madras: Government Press, pp. 86–7.

(¹⁵) Quoted in Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, vol. 4, p. 198.

(¹⁶) See, for example, Susan Bayly. 1999. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Nicholas B. Dirks. 2001. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Peter Gottschalk. 2005. 'Visions of Incompatibility: Categorizing Islam and Hinduism in Scholarship', in James Blumethal (ed.), *Incompatible Visions: South Asian Religions in History and Culture: Essays in Honor of David M. Knipe*, Madison: Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin–Madison, pp. 1–20.

(¹⁷) Mohamad, *Maritime History*, pp. 81–2, 336–7; Tschacher, 'Circulating Islam', p. 51.

(¹⁸) Thoppil Mohammed Meeran. 1998. *The Story of a Seaside Village*. Translated by M. Vijayalakshmi. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

(¹⁹) Mark Wilks. 1810–17. *Historical Sketches of the South of India, in an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysoor; from the Origin of the Hindoo Government of that State, to the Extinction of the Mohammedan Dynasty in 1799*, 3 vols. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme.

(²⁰) Wilks, *Historical Sketches*, vol. 1, p. 242.

(²¹) Wilks, *Historical Sketches*, vol. 1, p. 242.

(²²) Wilks, *Historical Sketches*, vol 1, p. 242.

(²³) Wilks, *Historical Sketches*, vol. 1, p. 242.

(²⁴) Bjerrum, 'Tamil Moslems', p. 172.

(²⁵) Dennis B. McGilvray. 1998. 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32(2): 433-83, quoted on pp. 446-56.

(²⁶) Jacob Pandian. 1978. 'The Hindu Caste System and Muslim Ethnicity: The Labbai of a Tamil Village in South India', *Ethnohistory*, 25(2): 141-57.

(²⁷) Pandian, 'Hindu Caste System', p. 147.

(²⁸) Pandian, 'Hindu Caste System', p. 152.

(²⁹) Mattison Mines. 1972. *Muslim Merchants: The Economic Behaviour of an Indian Muslim Community*. New Delhi: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, pp. 23-8.

(³⁰) M.A. Kalam. 2004. 'Language, Ethnicity and Identity among the Muslims of the Palar Valley', in Loraine Kennedy (ed.), *Industrialisation and Socio-Cultural Change in the Tannery Belt of the Palar Valley (Tamil Nadu)*. Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, pp. 19-29, see pp. 24-5.

(³¹) Fanselow, 'Disinvention of Caste'.

(³²) Frank S. Fanselow. 1989. 'Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu (India): An Historical Perspective', *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 10(1): 264-89, see pp. 274-5.

(³³) Soumhya Venkatesan. 2009. *Craft Matters: Artisans, Development and the Indian Nation*. Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan.

(³⁴) Venkatesan, *Craft Matters*, pp. 56-61.

(³⁵) Venkatesan, *Craft Matters*, pp. 56-61.

(³⁶) The figures are quoted in Mahendra K. Premi. 2006. *Population of India in the New Millennium: Census 2001*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, pp. 194-6.

(³⁷) A.G. Mohamed Mustapha. 2003. 'Indian Muslims: Missionary and Community Activities in South East Asia', in Rhama Sankaran (ed.), *History in Silence: Masjid Abdul Gafoor*, Singapore: Masjid Abdul Gafoor, pp. 75-9, see p. 75.

(³⁸) Mustapha, 'Indian Muslims', p. 75.

(³⁹) S. Anwar. 2011. 'Tamil Muslims and the Dravidian Movement: Alliance and Contradictions', in Vinod K. Jairath (ed.), *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim Communities in India*, New Delhi: Routledge, pp. 199-219; J.B.P. More. 1993. 'Tamil Muslims and Non-Brahmin Atheists, 1925-1940', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 27(1): 83-104; S.M. Abdul Khader Fakhri. 2008. *Dravidian Sahibs and*

Brahmin Maulanas: The Politics of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu, 1930–1967. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 45–67.

(⁴⁰) In a curious inversion, Venkatesan reports that one of her ‘Rauther’ respondents claimed that Rāvuttars were superior among Muslims like Brahmins were among Hindus. Venkatesan, *Craft Matters*, p. 59.

(⁴¹) J.B.P. More. 2004. *Muslim Identity, Print Culture and the Dravidian Factor in Tamil Nadu*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 18.

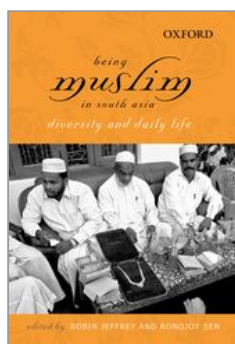
(⁴²) Prime Minister’s High Level Committee. 2006. *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report*. New Delhi: Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, p. 204, Table 10.3.

(⁴³) Fanselow, ‘Disinvention of Caste’, pp. 214–15; High Level Committee, *Social, Economic and Educational Status*, p. 197.

(⁴⁴) Fanselow, ‘Disinvention of Caste’, pp. 214–15.

(⁴⁵) High Level Committee, *Social, Economic and Educational Status*, pp. 192–3, quoted on p. 197.

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Matrilocal Marriage and Women's Property among the Moors of Sri Lanka*

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Abstract and Keywords

The Muslims, or 'Moors', of Sri Lanka are a Tamil-speaking minority representing 9 per cent of the population, nearly one third of whom live in the agricultural easternmost region, where they share a distinctive matrilineal and matrilocal family system with their Tamil Hindu neighbours. Despite the destructive 2004 tsunami and the decades-long war with the Tamil Tigers, the basic pattern of Moorish women's dowry and property rights has been traced over four decades of ethnographic research in the eastern town of Akkaraipattu in Ampara District. The larger project from which this chapter is drawn reveals that similar matrilocal dowry-house patterns are shared by Moors throughout Sri Lanka and also among a number of Muslim communities in coastal Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Keywords: matriliney, matrilocality, Sri Lanka, Tamil, marriage customs, Moors

On 26 December 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami struck the eastern coastline of Sri Lanka with catastrophic force, instantly erasing shoreline villages and beachfront neighbourhoods that had been historic Tamil-speaking Hindu, Christian, and Muslim settlements for centuries. This is a region where the decades-long insurgency by **(p.88)** the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as well as the brutal campaigns of the Sri Lankan military and Indian Peace Keeping Force, had already inflicted trauma and suffering on all ethnic communities. In the wake of the 2009 defeat of the LTTE, and with the final phases of post-tsunami reconstruction now completed, an opening has finally

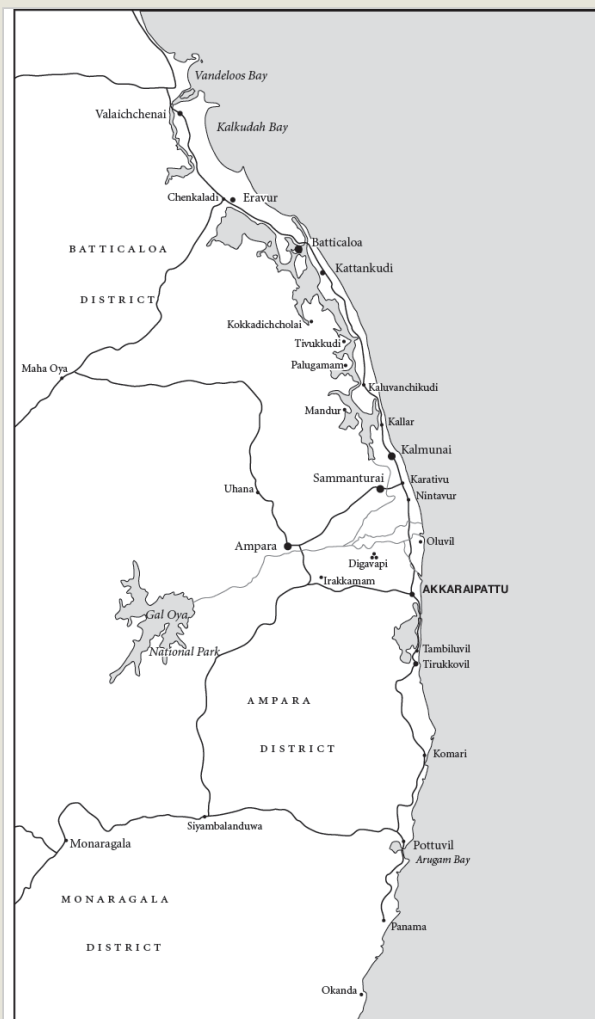
appeared for renewed field research on the region's distinctive multi-ethnic society and culture, including its women-centred marriage and family patterns. Working first with a research team on post-tsunami housing reconstruction efforts, and more recently as an independent ethnographer in the coastal town of Akkaraipattu, I have been seeking to discover what long-term impacts the civil war and the tsunami have had on matrilocal marriage residence patterns and the property rights of women in both Tamil and Muslim families. Here, I will focus on the Tamil-speaking Moorish community in Akkaraipattu, a bustling agricultural town of 70,000 located in Ampara district in the heart of Sri Lanka's eastern 'matrilineal belt' (see Figure 5.1).

Viewed within a larger historical and regional framework, the Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Muslims, or 'Moors', of Sri Lanka are linked with the south Indian Tamil Muslim communities described by Tschacher (see Chapter 4), as well as with the Mappila Muslims of Kerala.¹ Known in the colonial period as 'Moors' (from the Portuguese term *Mouro* for north African Arabs), and in their own Tamil vernacular as *sonahar* (*cōnakar*), they have chosen to identify themselves in the post-independence period as 'Muslims', partly as a religious gesture and partly to distance themselves from the ethno-nationalist agenda of the militant Hindu and Christian Tamils.² I have chosen to use 'Moor' and 'Muslim' interchangeably

(p.89)

(p.90) here to emphasize their distinctiveness as a Sri Lankan ethnic community.³ Moors represent approximately 9 per cent of Sri Lanka's people, which is more than the 5.5 per cent Muslim share of the population in Tamil Nadu, but substantially less than the 23 per cent Mappila minority in Kerala.⁴ Although two-thirds of Sri Lanka's Muslims live and work—often but not always as business proprietors and professionals—in Sinhala Buddhist-majority cities, towns, and villages, the remaining one-third of the Muslim community live in the peripheral northern and eastern Tamil-speaking regions, where they are predominantly paddy farmers, fishermen, and traders. In the Batticaloa and Ampara districts on the east coast of the island where my fieldwork has been focused, the Moorish community has historically shared many local traditions and social practices with the Hindu Tamils derived from intermarriage and Islamic conversion. This is a region where warrior incursions from south India in the thirteenth century gave rise to a regional set of chiefdoms dominated by the matrilineal Hindu Mukkuvar caste originating in Kerala.⁵ Dowry

property among both the Tamil Hindus and the Moors represents the historical transformation of an earlier matrilineal Mukkuvar law of inheritance.⁶ Tamil and Moorish marriage and family patterns in this region have attracted scholarly attention since the 1960s, led by the work (p.91) of Yalman⁷ who compared kinship and caste organization across several regions of the island, including the east coast. When I began my own fieldwork in 1969, I discovered a system of matrilineal clan (*kuṭi*) administration that governed both Hindu temples and Muslim mosques in Akkaraipattu, as well as a pattern of matrilocal marriage and dowry that was surprisingly uniform across all sectors of the local society. Today, a number of the oldest temples and mosques continue to be administered by male matrilineal clan trustees, but the larger clan system, with its feudal honorifics and traditional marriage alliances, is gradually eroding with



This map is not to scale and does not depict authentic boundaries.

Figure 5.1 . Map of Eastern Sri Lanka Showing the Matrilineal, Matrilocal Coastal Zone.

Source: Author

time.⁸ The east coast matrilocal dowry-house marriage pattern, on the other hand, was never intrinsically dependent upon the matrilineal clan hierarchy, nor did it have any necessary connection with the post-mortem inheritance of family property, which is governed here by Sri Lankan civil law for the Tamils and by Sri Lankan Islamic law for the Moors.⁹ Followed uniformly by Tamil and Moorish families at all levels of society, the matrilocal marriage system was fully functioning when eastern Sri Lanka entered the dark decades of the LTTE insurgency in the mid-1980s and was later tested by the tsunami of 2004.

The Sri Lankan Matrilocal Moorish Marriage Pattern

The Moorish household system is based upon the underlying cultural assumption that daughters require houses in order to be married, and that sons will join the natal households of their wives, at least initially. Postponing their own marriages if necessary, brothers are expected to contribute substantially to the construction of dowry houses for **(p.92)** their sisters. Once married matrilocally, a man must devote his primary loyalties to his wife's family. Needless to say, having multiple wives under this system—although permitted by Islamic law—is not a practical possibility.¹⁰ The first issue in any arranged marriage negotiation will be the provision of a house, which might be the bride's mother's dwelling or a newly constructed house nearby. If the bride's family has sufficient wealth and vacant property, it is common to see a cluster of adjacent homes arise in the same neighbourhood, occupied by a group of married sisters. Wealthy families may also include agricultural lands or other property holdings in the dowry offer, plus cash, jewellery, and household goods. Well-to-do parents have been known to construct identical side-by-side homes for daughters who are close in age, to avoid rivalry (see Figure 5.2). When I spotted a shiny new Toyota Prius hybrid sedan creeping along the rutted lanes of Akkaraipattu in 2012, I had to assume it was the automotive accoutrement to a lavish dowry house wedding.

The circumstances of individual families will vary, but the general expectation is that the Moorish bride and groom will live with the

(p.93) wife's family for an initial period of time, and at least until the birth of the first child. When the bride's next younger sister is ready to be wed, the parents will donate, construct, or rent if necessary a second dowry house into which they and their remaining unmarried children will then shift, leaving the first daughter and son-in-law and their children to carry on as an independent 'uxorilocal' family

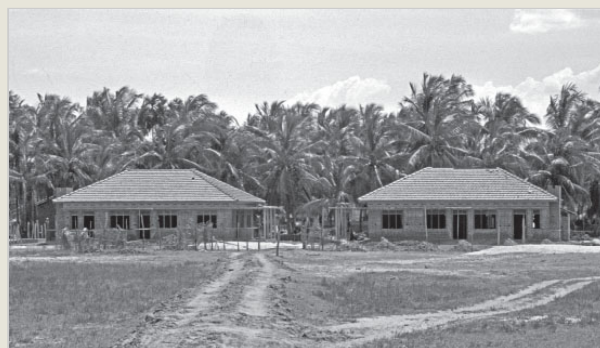


Figure 5.2 . Twin Dowry Houses under Construction for Two Moorish Daughters

where the wife owns the house. This repeating household developmental process will continue until all of the daughters have been married, at which point it is likely that the elderly parents will remain as co-tenants with one of their youngest married daughters. Meanwhile, all of the sons in the family will have married and moved into their wives' households, providing them access to the inter-generational dowry assets of their in-laws. If there is any residual wealth or property remaining when their parents die, all Muslim children will inherit according to Islamic law, which in Sri Lanka follows the Shafi'i legal school: two shares of inheritance for the sons and one share for the daughters. However, in a Moorish family with married daughters, there will be very little wealth that has not already been transferred as dowry, and sons in these circumstances will not expect to inherit much from their parents.

Obviously, this system 'works' most equitably where there are

Source: Author

both sons and daughters in a family, and where there is sufficient wealth to provide all daughters with dowry houses to begin with. The cultural expectation that unmarried sons will, if necessary, assist their impoverished sisters to find marriage partners is a critical back-up factor. It can also be hoped, but never guaranteed, that senior sons-in-law will in turn help to build up the dowries of their wives' younger unmarried sisters. Elsewhere I have described the example of the Qāzi of Akkaraipattu who had two sons (both schoolteachers) and seven daughters, each of whom required a dowry house for marriage.¹¹ In this case, the earnings of the two brothers were essential to fully complete the marriages of their sisters.

(p.94) Women's Property in the Wake of the 2004 Tsunami

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, I worked as part of a multidisciplinary research team to explore the uncertain cultural dimensions of post-disaster recovery in Sri Lanka.^{12,13} In collaboration with another anthropologist, Patricia Lawrence, I endeavoured to determine what impact the tsunami was likely to have on the long-term future of the matrilocal marriage system that had, until then, provided Tamil and Moorish women in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts with substantial real property in the form of dowry houses. In beachfront communities, the tsunami had destroyed countless family dwellings owned either singly or jointly by women, and subsequent bureaucratic regulations forbade reconstruction within a shifting patchwork of shoreline 'buffer zones'. Housing programmes of governmental as well as international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seemed blind to the fact that, in this region of the island, most of the demolished houses had been owned by women who had acquired them as dowry at marriage. Initially, they transferred relief and reconstruction resources—including legal title to new replacement houses—to men, assuming that they were the 'heads of household'. Local women's groups eventually became concerned this could deprive wives and daughters of their traditional economic and social capital long after the tsunami.

Our fieldwork in both Tamil as well as Moorish post-tsunami housing projects, however, revealed that families never lost sight of future marriage prospects for their daughters. In many cases, families who were lucky enough to survive the tsunami found themselves, five or six years later, in possession of a home far superior to the one destroyed or damaged by the sea. It became apparent that virtually all replacement housing built on the east coast after the tsunami would revert to female ownership when the next generation of daughters **(p.95)** acquired dowry houses in marriage. In wealthier Moorish neighbourhoods in towns such as Sainthamaruthu, the conspicuous post-tsunami enlargement and decorative embellishment of pre-existing Muslim residences strongly suggested an upwardly mobile dowry calculus at work. In poor Muslim weaving and fishing settlements such as Maruthamunai, where large-scale working-class housing projects and apartment blocks were erected by international aid organizations, practical access to employment and municipal services would affect their suitability as future dowry dwellings.¹⁴

Muslim Marriage and Women's Property after the Eelam Wars

The social wounds of disaster, displacement, and ethnic violence can never be healed for those families who lost members and loved ones, sometimes compelling widows and orphaned children to make extremely painful choices.¹⁵ However, since the end of the LTTE insurgency in 2009, the eastern region of the island has returned to relative peace and prosperity for the first time in nearly three decades, stimulated by dramatic infrastructural improvements in roads and municipal water supply. With a renewed interest in kinship and social structure, and eager to compare my fieldwork notes from the 1970s with contemporary life today, I started conducting research on **(p.96)** marriage trends in the town of Akkaraipattu in 2010.¹⁶ The findings that follow are preliminary results of a broader study still in progress, selected to highlight the specific circumstances of Muslim women. My knowledge of the current situation derives, first of all, from a long-term ethnographic engagement with the town and its region going back to 1969. This has given me a network of personal acquaintances who have grown older along with me and whose family histories are a part of my longitudinal research. To grasp the marriage patterns of the younger generation, however, I administered 40 questionnaire surveys in the Moorish neighbourhoods of Akkaraipattu, focusing on couples married after the 2004 tsunami. To get a glimpse of contemporary Moorish wedding ceremonies, I also acquired a collection of professionally produced wedding videos commissioned by families to commemorate the happy event. Most recently, in 2012, I recorded a small set of extended interviews, including 10 Moorish family case studies. In this discussion, I will focus on the broad trends that have emerged, supported by case study illustrations.

'Gift' Instead of 'Dowry'

In the Akkaraipattu mosque marriage registers that I inspected in the 1970s, each entry recorded the agreed-upon dowry from the bride's family, as well as the amount of Islamic bride wealth (*mahr*) given (or pledged) by the groom. Nowadays, only the value of the *mahr* is recorded, because dowry is not regarded as an Islamic requirement. The common Sri Lankan Tamil word for dowry, *cīṭaṇam*, is derived from *strīdhana*, a Sanskrit term meaning 'woman's property', and therefore the provision of dowry in this etymological and shastric sense is viewed by Muslim religious experts as a Hindu custom to be avoided. It is important to remember that in Sri Lanka, unlike India, dowry is perfectly legal. In fact, a Tamil lawyer in Akkaraipattu showed me copies of a standard pre-printed Tamil dowry deed form that is commonly filed with the courts. There are also no limitations on pre-mortem gifts of property in Sri Lankan Muslim law. This is quite different from the Muslim law of India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, (p. 97) where two-thirds of a person's estate should be transferred by compulsory Islamic inheritance rules, at least formally.¹⁷

In a legally binding dowry deed, both husband and wife have a joint undivided interest in the property, which demands the services of a lawyer to alter or to divide individually. Nowadays, many Tamil grooms insist upon signing a prenuptial dowry deed in order to assure their property rights in the marriage. In certain towns such as Nintavur, the same dowry deeds are widely used by Moorish families, but in Akkaraipattu the strong preference is to avoid them. Instead, Muslim parents in Akkaraipattu convey property to their daughters as an outright gift, ideally well before the marriage, which avoids any suggestion that they recognize 'dowry' as a legal or religious practice. The Tamil term *cīṭaṇam* (dowry) is still a part of everyday Moorish conversational Tamil, and everyone recognizes it to be a universal practice, but when pressed for details, they will emphasize that it is a no-strings-attached parental gift or 'donation' (*naṇkoṭai*) rather than a legal or religious obligation.

If Moorish brides have not been given legal ownership of their dowry houses prior to marriage, husbands will trust their in-laws to transfer legal title at a suitable—unspecified—date in the future. To insist on prompt legal transfer would be tactless, suggesting a lack of trust and loyalty on the part of the matrilocal son-in-law. In my research on post-tsunami housing projects, I encountered examples of both Tamil and Moorish couples whose demolished homes were found to have still belonged, legally, to the wife's mother. In order to avoid delays in obtaining relief and reconstruction funds, these families sometimes resorted to extra-legal post-facto alteration of the property title. Just recently, one middle-aged Muslim husband in Akkaraipattu admitted to me that it was only after he had applied for a new municipal water connection that he discovered he was living in a house still legally owned by his wife's maternal grandmother!

(p.98) Increase in the Value of *Mahr*

In the 1970s it was customary to regard the *mahr*, a payment from the groom to his bride that is required in Islamic law, as a purely nominal sum, usually 101 Sri Lankan rupees (SLR) or SLR 1,001. Even such small payments of *mahr* were routinely deferred at the signing of the Muslim marriage contract, to be paid only if a divorce were later to ensue. There are marriages in Akkaraipattu today in which the *mahr* payment is still such a nominal and symbolic amount, but these tend to be either poor families or those who are inspired by Muslim reformist (*tawhid*) preaching that advocates a return to simpler and more austere Islamic marriage practices. It is agreed that the nature and amount of the *mahr* is a decision entirely in the hands of the Muslim groom, but there has been a striking tendency for the value of the *mahr* to increase dramatically in middle-class Muslim family weddings. In place of a cash payment, it is now common for wealthier grooms to present their brides with an item of gold jewellery, sometimes a bracelet but more often a necklace. The Muslim registrar of marriages records the *mahr* on the official government marriage form by indicating both the nature of the gift and its current market value. The inflation in *mahr* is seen most strikingly in the gold jewellery presented by Moorish grooms who are professionally employed abroad. At a *nikāh* (marriage registration) I attended in 2011, the groom, who had a well-paid position in the Gulf, offered as *mahr* a stunning gold necklace from Dubai worth SLR 250,000, equal to US\$ 2,300 at the time (see Figure 5.3). Later, at the bride's house, the *mahr* necklace was ceremonially tied on behalf of the groom by his married elder sister. In the 1970s, such a Moorish wedding chain would have been called a *tāli*, the same term used by the Tamils, but now it is referred to as a generic necklace (*cavaṭi*) to avoid any Hindu religious connotations. Also, in the past it would have been commonplace for the groom to purchase the bride's necklace with dowry cash advanced by her family, whereas nowadays—when the jewellery is bestowed as *mahr*—there is the expectation that the groom will use his own money. Practically always, however, a gold necklace or chain of some kind will be tied around the neck of the Moorish bride at her *kaliyāṇam* wedding celebration, just as it is at a Tamil Hindu or Christian wedding. **(p.99)**

Changes in Moorish Wedding Ceremonies

The most obvious changes in Muslim weddings since the 1970s have been the reduction or elimination of formal food exchanges and ritual visitations between women of the two families in the period prior to the wedding, the drastic simplification of *kaliyāṇam* rituals at the bride's house on the wedding day, and the adoption of a new event, the *waleema* reception, which is sponsored by the groom's family in the days immediately following the *kaliyāṇam*. In the 1970s the prevalence of

bilateral cross-cousin marriage (in which a man marries either his mother's brother's daughter or his father's sister's daughter) was somewhat greater than it is today, as was the solicitude for exogamous marriage alliances between prestigious matrilineal descent groups represented by male matriclan trustees (*kuṭi maraikkārs*) of the mosques. Nowadays, the playful visitation and grooming rituals performed by cousins seem to have declined. Formerly, the midnight wedding procession of the groom to the bride's house would have (p.100) included his sisters and female cousins bearing the *kūraippēṭṭi*, a box or suitcase containing the bright red or pink bridal sari that is a gift of the groom, and there would have been volleys of noisy ululation (*kuravai*) from all the women. Middle-class Moorish brides today are often seen in white north Indian-or Pakistani-style-'*sharara*' or '*lehenga*' skirts with embroidered tops of three-quarter-length sleeves, worn with dupattas and veils, and increasingly with hijab head coverings as well (see Figure 5.4). The raucous public delivery of a red bridal sari by the groom's side has virtually disappeared. Although many of these older details have been dropped from the Moorish wedding repertoire, a few customs such as the *pāl paḷam*, the ritual sharing of a drink made of milk and fruit between bride and groom (even if it is now a modern carbonated beverage sipped through a shared soda straw) has been retained. The customary hour for Muslim weddings in the 1970s was often after midnight, but Sri Lankan army curfews during the LTTE emergency period forced Moorish families to conduct weddings in the daytime. A Muslim acquaintance of mine remarked this was the only useful thing the LTTE had accomplished during the Eelam wars.



Figure 5.3 . Gold Necklace from Dubai Being Displayed to Mosque Officials as *Mahr* at a Muslim Marriage Registration

Source: Author

Guests at Moorish weddings in the 1970s would have been served a cooked meal of some kind, usually a plate of rice and meat curry, but now the guests receive only commercially boxed refreshment parcels of sweets and soft drinks. Across town, however, the guests at a Tamil Hindu wedding still enjoy a plate of rice and chicken curry, often catered by Muslim eating establishments. The big wedding feast for Muslims has now become the *waleema*, a reception sponsored by the groom's family at their residence or in a rented venue. The *waleema* (Arabic *walīma*, 'banquet', pronounced in Sri Lanka as *vālimā*) is a meal that concludes Arab weddings in the patrilocal Middle Eastern tradition. It also appears to be widely followed in India, but it was unknown in the 1970s in Akkaraipattu. Instead there was the homecoming visit (*kāl māri pōkuta*, 'change of footing') of the newly-weds to the groom's house for a period of several days, during which they would participate in a series of invited meals prepared by his family and friends. Formal printed *waleema* invitations are now a standard part of Moorish wedding planning throughout Sri Lanka, a gesture of conformity to what is now understood to be proper Islamic (that is, Middle Eastern as well as South Asian Muslim) wedding etiquette. **(p.101)**

Contemporary Moorish Marital Choice

East coast Moors have the same Dravidian-type kinship system that is found throughout Sri Lanka, as well as in south **(p. 102)** India.¹⁸ Like the Tamils and Sinhalese, they classify their parallel cousins (father's brothers' children and mother's sisters' children) as siblings, and they regard their cross cousins (father's sisters' children and mother's brothers' children) as permissible—sometimes even preferred—marriage partners. However, marriage between a man and his elder sister's daughter (eZD), quite common in Tamil Nadu,¹⁹ is not found in Sri Lanka, and especially not in the east where it would violate matrilineal clan exogamy rules. In 1971 about 17 per cent of Muslim marriages in



Figure 5.4 . Moorish Bride Wearing Contemporary Wedding Outfit and Hijab
Source: Author

Akkaraipattu occurred between first cross cousins (MBD or FZD), with an

unspoken tendency to favour the mother's brother's daughter.²⁰ Four decades later in 2011, marriages between first cross cousins had dropped to 12.5 per cent of my Muslim survey sample, but it still clearly represents a viable marriage option.²¹ In 1971 the tiny number of Muslim marriages that violated the strict matriclan exogamy rule were viewed as scandalous and embarrassing.²² In comparison, 10 per cent of Muslim couples in my 2011 survey freely acknowledged belonging to the same matriclan with no apparent discomfort, and 18 per cent could not identify the matriclan of one of the spouses. This reflects a growing indifference to traditionally enforced matrilineal descent rules among young people today.

In 1971 I collected no statistics on 'love marriages' because they were seemingly so rare, but in 2011 the share of 'love marriages' in my Moorish survey was 35 per cent, including one romantic couple who turned out to be cross cousins themselves.²³ As with the Tamils, **(p.103)** Muslim parents nowadays in Akkaraipattu increasingly approve such love marriages and celebrate them publically as if they had been arranged, including the provision of a dowry house for the couple. Finally, after all cross-cousin marriages and love marriages had been accounted for, nearly half (45 per cent) of Moorish marriages in my 2011 survey could be classified as arranged marriages between 'unrelated' families. Nevertheless, these families were quite likely to have had some prior knowledge of each other, without which many arranged marriage proposals would have been difficult to conceive in the first place. While I detected in the words of several young Muslims in my survey a desire to forge wider social networks through 'marrying out' of the family, and a biomedical concern about the genetic risks of cousin marriage, there remains a preference among Moorish parents to arrange marriages for their children within the town or the local region.

Case Studies of Moorish Marriage in Akkaraipattu

Modern Cross-cousin Marriage

The two oldest daughters of a Moorish journalist, a friend I have known for 40 years, had arranged marriages with unrelated husbands, one a teacher and the other a rice-mill operator. However, the journalist's third and youngest daughter Sareena (aged 22) was recently wed to her cross cousin, her father's sister's son Sarjaz, who is employed in England with an information technology (IT) firm.²⁴ In talking with the shy newly-wed couple, I learned they had never imagined being husband and wife in childhood, but when the idea was suggested by Sarjaz's mother a few years ago, he readily agreed. Sarjaz was 31 at the time of his wedding, and he remains deeply focused on computers today, so this was a feasible proposal that solved a looming problem. 'This is my parents' decision.... They suggested I should marry in **(p.104)** my uncle's house. I was happy. I've known her very well for a very long time. She is also happy.... This is easier and better than going to a family outside. They are known people. The whole thing could be handled easily. So, I said yes.' Sareena's parents are also pleased with this secure match that settles the last of their daughters in life. They will

continue to reside in her comfortable dowry house when she eventually joins Sarjaz in the United Kingdom. I asked Sareena whether her parents had provided her with paddy lands in addition to gifting her the dowry house. The fact that it was a marriage negotiated between a brother and a sister seems to have moderated the groom's side's dowry demands. Sareena succinctly replied: 'They didn't ask, and we didn't give.'

The most enthusiastic advocate of cross-cousin marriage in my 2012 interview group was Mr Shahabdeen, a prosperous Moorish community leader in an outlying neighbourhood of Akkaraipattu, who eagerly explained that he and two of his brothers were married to three cross-cousin sisters, all daughters of his own mother's brother (*tāy māmā*), who had been the original founder of the settlement (see Figure 5.5). One of Shahabdeen's daughters is also married to a man who is her classificatory cross cousin. It turned out that Mr Shahabdeen's female cross cousin, Asiya Umma, had been promised as his future wife when she was just a newborn and he was only seven years of age. This is a custom called '*sanakkoorai*' (*cāṇaikkūrai*, literally 'infant wedding sari') in which a boy's parents place diaper cloths and baby blankets under the infant girl—in imitation of a bridal *kūrai*

(p.105) (wedding sari)—as a token of their intention to have their son marry her when she grows up. Mr Shahabdeen continues to view all such preferential Dravidian marriage practices in a positive light, extolling the domestic happiness he and Asiya Umma have enjoyed over their long married life (see Figure 5.6).

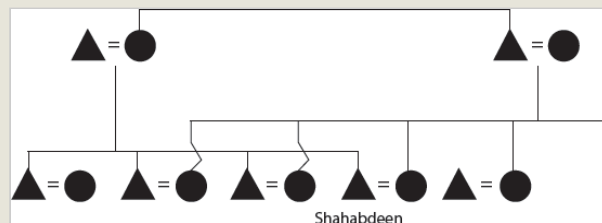


Figure 5.5 . Kinship Diagram Showing Cross-cousin Marriages of Shahabdeen and His Brothers with Three Sisters

Source: Author



High-stakes Arranged Marriage

Mr Zafar, a well-to-do Moorish bank manager, described to me his frantic reaction when a favourable marriage proposal arrived suddenly for his

Figure 5.6 . Shahabdeen and His Wife: A Cross-cousin Marriage Arranged in Infancy

Source: Author

daughter before he had a dowry house finished for her to live in. The groom's family owned a home in Akkaraipattu near Mr Zafar's mother, but they were now primarily living in Colombo and the boy was working professionally in Qatar. Because he was visiting Sri Lanka only briefly, the boy made a hurried overnight visit by express bus to inspect the girl before he agreed to the marriage, and much of the prenuptial inter-familial etiquette was dispensed **(p.106)** with. Mr Zafar immediately hired 22 craftsmen to put the finishing touches on his daughter's dowry house before the groom's impending departure for the Gulf. 'There were only sixteen days.... [The father of the groom] came from Colombo on the 24th of the month and insisted the wedding should be on the 28th.... I said I will still be laying the floor tiles on the 28th!' In the end, the wedding took place on the 29th, and the wedding reception (*waleema*) was held the very next day to accommodate the groom's travel schedule.

When I spoke with Mr Zafar, his daughter was pregnant at home with her parents in her spacious Akkaraipattu dowry house, and his son-in-law was back working in the Gulf. The whole marriage had occurred so suddenly that Mr Zafar was still sorting it out in his mind, including some misgivings about his new in-laws who were asking his daughter to stay with them in Colombo.

They have told us to leave her there because her husband is abroad [in Qatar].... But we may not agree to leave her there when the husband is away. There is nothing to worry about—they are not going to mistreat her.... But the girl has to be with her mother. It is good like that if the daughter is going to have a baby and so on.

Love Marriage with Brotherly Support

Sihana (aged 22) and her elder brother (aged 23) have relied on their own resources since their mother died and their father left to remarry another woman. Both of them enjoy successful love marriages, and they jointly reside in their mother's original dowry house, which will eventually be passed on to Sihana with the concurrence of her brother. Sihana's sister-in-law also has a dowry house of her own in another part of town, and Sihana's brother and his wife often spend weekends there with her parents. However, because Sihana has a young child, and her husband is often away for lengthy periods of time, her brother and sister-in-law have chosen to share the house with Sihana during the week. This joint sibling household is further strengthened by the fact that Sihana and her sister-in-law have been close friends since their school days. Sihana was introduced to her future husband by one of her own cross cousins, and close

family relations on all sides seem to have approved of these love marriages. (p. 107) It is clear that Sihana and her brother feel a strong bond of loyalty and friendship, which is a commonly remarked feature of South Asian family systems.²⁵

Because of her successful love marriage and her calm equanimity, I ventured to ask Sihana her opinion about the overall benefits versus drawbacks of matrilocal residence for Moorish wives. Without hesitation, she said:

There are more benefits for women. Men get used to it. They are always able to venture out anywhere, so they can come and live in our house. It is difficult for women who are used to being indoors to go out and live somewhere else. Problems can occur with the sister-in-law or the mother-in-law. Therefore, having the groom come to the bride's house is good.

Similar views were expressed by a Moorish mother and her love-matched daughter in an outlying hamlet of Akkaraipattu.

It is better for the *māppil.l.ai* [groom] to come to the house of the *pen*. [woman, bride].... If she goes there [to the groom's house], we don't know how things are over there.... If she is there, we will not know if she is eating or starving.... In the mother-in-law's house we cannot live like we can in our own house.

Dowry Barrier for Poor Women

The deed to a dowry house (and sometimes paddy land) that is gifted by the bride's parents, together with the inflated *mahr* that is nowadays actually tendered by the groom, provides Moorish brides from middle-income and wealthy families with a substantial share of capital resources in the marriage. However, the daughters of poor parents who lack the money to provide suitable dowry houses find themselves at a drastic disadvantage in the marriage market, in which case a love marriage may be their only hope. Nisa, an energetic young female Muslim social worker who confronts the plight of poor unmarried Moorish women on a daily basis, emphasized this problem at the outset of our conversation: '[In this low-income Moorish neighbourhood] (p.108) unmarried women are living at home like slaves, because they do not have the means to get married.... Men are still following the traditional dowry system; they will expect a house, property, lands, and so forth.... This situation is because of poverty, and it has to be changed.' Nisa at one point imagined a cultural shift to scriptural Islamic marriage practices: 'In our [original Islamic] culture, men have to build their houses and take women into them. If they do that, there won't be any problem for the parents. There won't be any problem whatever the number of daughters the parents may have.' In Nisa's own case, she seized the opportunity for a matrilocal arranged marriage with only modest dowry demands, reasoning

that it would conserve her family's dowry resources for her older sister, still unmarried at age 29.

The economic barrier to dowry marriage is especially acute with female-headed households in which there is no income-producing husband or father, a problem that has been well studied in the war-ravaged and tsunami-affected eastern region.²⁶ In settlements north of Batticaloa such as Eravur and Valachchenai, where Muslims found themselves directly in the crossfire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army, many Moorish women sought employment as housemaids in the Middle East simply to help their families survive.²⁷ A poignant illustration from my own fieldwork is the case of Mazahira, a poor Moorish widow with three children and no surviving parents whose husband was killed by the LTTE while working as a paddy cultivator south of Akkaraipattu. Her husband had pawned everything to buy seed and fertilizer, but after his death Mazahira managed to earn money by making breakfast hoppers (*appam*), rolling cigarettes (*bīḍī*), and weeding rice fields. It was an epic story, but the most compelling fact is that Mazahira eventually worked in Kuwait as a housemaid for three years in order to earn the money to build a dowry house for her daughter—the very house in which our interview took place. Mazahira's younger sister also worked in Kuwait to earn her dowry, and I later recorded a similar tale from a poor Washer caste woman (**p.109**) on the Tamil side of town.²⁸ Towards the end of our conversation, Mazahira acknowledged that some Moorish grooms these days were voicing progressive values: 'Some of them think it is not fashionable or civilized to take dowry.' But she then ruefully added, 'Slim and beautiful—for such a girl a house may not be necessary. But for a dark, lame, ugly girl they will demand a house, a dowry, and everything else.'

Forbidden Cousin Love

Moorish kin terms for mother's sisters' children and father's brothers' children classify these parallel cousins as siblings, that is, as elder or younger brothers and sisters. Unlike cross cousins, who are potential marriage partners, parallel cousins are governed by the same incest taboo that prohibits marriage with immediate 'born-with' (*kūṭa pīranta*) siblings. While there has been some weakening in the rule against marriage with a member of one's own matrilineal clan (which is also defined as a kind of sibling incest), the idea of romantic love between parallel cousins remains virtually unimaginable. Because of this very fact, it has been possible for a few love affairs between Moorish parallel cousins to blossom secretly under the noses of their families, then later to receive the approval of mosque officials because parallel cousin marriage is permitted in Islam and is widely practised in the Middle East. This is an Islamic escape clause that would not be available to Tamil Hindu lovers in the same situation.

In one case, a son and daughter of two brothers, both Muslim school principals, developed a quiet affection that was viewed by everyone—family members and childhood friends alike—as a normal 'brother-sister' relationship. As they

became adults, it did not matter that they spoke face-to-face and talked over their mobile phones. The girl was said to be quite religious, and the boy was sympathetic to the Muslim reformist Tablighi Jamaat. He eventually obtained employment in Dubai. Finally, when the girl's family had gone to Colombo (p. 110) on a shopping trip, the boy secretly flew back to Colombo, met the girl at an appointed place and time, and legally married her before either family had noticed she was missing. The couple immediately flew back to Dubai, and their anxious parents realized only later what had happened. The Muslim marriage registrar in the Colombo suburb had no awareness of their circumstances, as well as no legal power to block their marriage in any case, since they were legal adults. Six years have passed, and they now have a young son. Both families are reconciled to the marriage, and there is a vacant dowry house for the couple in Akkaraipattu. In Dubai, where they currently reside, their patrilineal parallel cousin marriage is regarded as entirely normal.

A second case involves the children of two sisters. The girl's mother died when she was only eight years old. Then her father remarried and moved away, leaving her and her siblings in a disadvantaged situation. The girl herself was sickly and had lots of health problems, but her mother's sister and her children (all parallel cousins) were helpful in getting her medical treatment, especially one male 'cousin brother' who was just one year older. Initially, no one thought anything about his special helpfulness towards his 'cousin sister', but as they became teenagers the girl's older brother began to suspect something. Because the brother was getting increasingly angry, a retired teacher next door intervened to act as a mediator. He first went to the *katib* of their mosque, and to a local madrasa, to verify there was no Islamic impediment to such a marriage, and then he explained the situation to her brother and the boy's family. They eventually married matrilocally when she was 28 and he was 29, later giving birth to a son and a daughter. For many years, however, the husband's mother refused to speak to her daughter-in-law, who is also her sororal niece (related to her as *makaḷ*, 'daughter'). The husband has since died, and the wife continues to raise her children in her deceased mother's house, where she earns money by steaming string hoppers (*iṭiyappam*) for sale.

Tawhid Marriage Model

The influence of Islamic reform movements that are critical of customs and practices thought to be of Tamil Hindu origin can be detected in some of the Moorish marriages I documented in Akkaraipattu. A local Muslim preacher, Anwar Maulavi, has attracted followers to what is (p.111) loosely termed his '*tawhid*' theology (referring to the strict unity and absolute alterity of Allah), which he preaches under the banner of his Centre for Call and Guidance.²⁹ He now has mosque congregations in a number of the peripheral, lower-income Muslim neighbourhoods of Akkaraipattu. His *tawhid* viewpoint on marriage emphasizes the simplicity and austerity of the Quran's instructions and the Prophet Muhammad's examples. At a practical level, this means avoidance of all

ostentatious *mahr* and cash dowries, elimination of any jewellery that could be construed as a required *tāli* necklace and any obligatory presentation of an expensive wedding sari (*kūrai*), and in general shunning superfluous wedding customs that are shared with the Hindu Tamils. *Tawhid* preaching also urges Moorish couples to follow the Prophet's example by residing in a house provided entirely by the husband. We have already seen this Quranic ideal invoked on behalf of impoverished Moorish women unable to attract husbands because of insufficient dowry.

Two husbands in my 2012 interviews expressed admiration for this *tawhid* patrilocal (or virilocal) marriage ideal. The first was Jazeem, a university-trained computer technician who has an approved love marriage with Nadira Umma, also a university graduate, the daughter of a prosperous textile trader who has deeded her a comfortable house in Akkaraipattu. When Jazeem was visited a year earlier, in 2011, he had taken his new bride to live with his own parents, rather than staying with his wife's family as local custom would dictate. His plan was to construct a new dwelling on a building plot he had purchased for himself, thereby eliminating any need for his wife's dowry house and the ensuing 'slave' mentality to which he says a matrilocal son-in-law is susceptible. 'Taking everything from them and living in their house.... He will not have any "guts".' A year later, in 2012, I found Jazeem (p.112) living matrilocally with his wife and her parents in her appointed dowry house, but still clinging to the dream of a separate home on his own property. 'Even though this house is written in her name, I don't want to claim ownership.... As far as I am concerned, it is temporary.' Meanwhile, however, Jazeem's wife and her parents appeared totally satisfied with this 'temporary' matrilocal arrangement.

A second case illustrates how unforeseen events can lead to new residential possibilities in line with *tawhid* ideals. Rijaz and his wife Hasana are first cross cousins (MBD and FZD) whose marriage was long planned by their parents using the traditional infant engagement practice (*cān.aikkūr_ai*).³⁰ This couple had always been *tawhid* followers, as the description of their austere and inexpensive Muslim wedding ceremony suggested: only token *mahr* (SLR 1,001), no necklace or wedding sari, not even a *waleema* wedding banquet. Rijaz, a tractor driver, had been living in Hasana's dowry house adjacent to her parents near the seashore in Akkaraipattu when the tsunami struck in 2004. Miraculously, Hasana and her newborn son survived after more than a month in the hospital, but coastal 'buffer zone' regulations made it impossible for them to rebuild on the site of Hasana's original dowry house. With Hasana's parents likewise homeless and dispossessed, the couple sought help from Rijaz's parents, who live in a western neighbourhood far from the tsunami destruction. Rijaz's mother deeded a vacant lot she owned to Rijaz, and four years later he completed a new post-tsunami house with international NGO assistance. Hasana says their new family home located away from both sets of parents suits her nicely. 'In our opinion, it is better to stay alone, separately.... If we live

separately in our own place, there is no problem for anybody.' However, Hasana also mentioned that, because of her close brush with death in the tsunami, she is terrified whenever she visits her mother's new house that is located closer to the seashore. 'Even if I go and stay at my mother's place, I would get up at midnight and want to come back here. I am afraid.'

(p.113) ***

The Moorish matrilocal marriage system in eastern Sri Lanka has proven highly resilient in the face of the tsunami disaster and the vicissitudes of the Eelam wars. Virtually all Moorish brides still begin their wedded lives living with their parents, where their in-marrying husbands join them. With their mothers' domestic supervision and their married sisters living close by, matrilocal Muslim brides enjoy a valuable household support network for childcare and some degree of protection from domestic violence. A similar matrilocal tendency has been noted among rural Muslims in Wellassa,³¹ among urban Moors in Colombo and Galle,³² as well as in southern coastal Muslim settlements in Tamil Nadu such as Kayalpattinam.³³ Expulsion by the LTTE in 1990 disrupted similar residence and dowry patterns among the Muslims of Jaffna and Mannar.³⁴ Because the Tamil Hindu concept of dowry (*cīṭaṇam*) has been judged to be un-Islamic, Muslim parents often legally assign houses to their daughters as an outright prenuptial gift, and sons seldom expect to receive post-mortem inheritance from their parents. The payment of Islamic bride price (*mahr*) from the groom to the bride, formerly a trifling sum, has now become a major gift in wealthier families—perhaps a gold necklace worth SLR 200,000 or more.

(p.114) Combining their exclusively owned dowry property with the expensive *mahr* they now receive from their husbands, middle- and upper-class Muslim wives in Sri Lanka potentially control more personal wealth than their Tamil Hindu sisters, who must often share their dowry property jointly with their husbands. It should also be noted that both Tamil and Moorish wives routinely manage their family's income, expenditure, and savings (the latter often by means of monthly contributions to a neighbourhood 'chit' scheme). However, poverty inevitably places women at a grave disadvantage in any type of dowry system. In Sri Lanka, without a house from her parents, a daughter is virtually unmarriageable unless she can find a love match. Impoverished Muslim women have resorted to working as housemaids in the Gulf in order to build dowry houses for themselves or their daughters.

When compared with the patrilocal, patrilineal household patterns typically found in much of South Asia, this matrilocal family pattern can be seen to have some obvious practical advantages for women,³⁵ although there has never been any reason to portray it as a 'feminist nirvana'.³⁶ Research conducted in 2008 by a UNDP survey team revealed ample evidence of domestic violence against poor Tamil and Moorish wives, as well as festering disputes over dowry promises that

were impossible for the bride's family to fulfil.³⁷ Especially if the marriage offers him very little dowry capital to begin with, there is always a realistic danger that the husband may simply walk away.

In the domain of marital choice, two-thirds of the young Moorish couples I surveyed in 2011 had marriages arranged by their families, either with cross cousins or with unrelated partners. However, love marriage is on the rise, and it is increasingly approved by Moorish parents who choose to celebrate it like an arranged match, including the bestowal of a dowry house. A challenge to the matrilocal marriage system has come from locally based *tawhid* reformist clerics who preach an 'authentic' type of Islamic marriage in which the **(p.115)** husband provides everything, including a house, for his wife. While destitute daughters can dream of such a revolutionary shift, and a few *tawhid*-minded bridegrooms may aspire to achieve it, the matrilocal dowry house system continues to provide strong emotional, social, and economic advantages for the majority of Muslim women in Sri Lanka.

Notes:

(*) I wish to acknowledge the professional collaboration and assistance of Mr Nilam Hamead in all phases of the fieldwork conducted in 2012, including translation of the recorded marriage interviews conducted in Tamil. I am also grateful to Ms Tasneem Hamead for information regarding contemporary Sri Lankan Muslim bridal fashions.

(¹) Kathleen Gough. 1961. 'Mappilla: North Kerala', in David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough (eds), *Matrilineal Kinship*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 415-42; Roland E. Miller. 1976. *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends*. Madras: Orient Longman; Dennis B. McGilvray. 1998. 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32(2): 433-83.

(²) Dennis B. McGilvray. 2011. 'Sri Lankan Muslims: Between Ethno-nationalism and the Global *Ummah*', *Nations and Nationalism*, 17(1): 45-64.

(³) Sri Lanka also has a small community of Malay Muslims who were brought to the island during the Dutch colonial period, as well as Gujarati-speaking Bohras and Memons in Colombo. Some of the Malays have intermarried with Moors, but they are not part of this research project. A larger discussion of Sri Lankan Muslim ethnonyms may be found in McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims', p. 434.

(⁴) Mushirul Hasan. 1997. *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*. Boulder: Westview Press.

(⁵) Dennis B. McGilvray. 2008. *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, Ch. 2.

(⁶) Dennis B. McGilvray. 2011. 'Dowry in Batticaloa: The Historical Transformation of a Matrilineal Property System', in H.L. Seneviratne (ed.), *The Anthropologist and the Native: Essays for Gananath Obeyesekere*, London and New York: Anthem Press, pp. 137–59.

(⁷) Nur Yalman. 1967. *Under the Bo Tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship, and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

(⁸) McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*.

(⁹) Kanchana N. Ruwanpura. 2006. *Matrilineal Communities, Patriarchal Realities: A Feminist Nirvana Uncovered*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press and Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, p. 10 and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura. 2009. 'Putting Houses in Place: Rebuilding Communities in Post-tsunami Sri Lanka', *Disasters*, 33(3): 436–56, confuses dowry with matrilineal inheritance.

(¹⁰) Plural marriage with two sisters might work, but it is extremely rare.

(¹¹) Dennis B. McGilvray. 1989. 'Households in Akkaraipattu: Dowry and Domestic Organization among the Matrilineal Tamils and Moors of Sri Lanka', in John N. Gray and David J. Mearns (eds), *Society from the Inside Out: Anthropological Perspectives on the South Asian Household*, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, pp. 192–235.

(¹²) Dennis B. McGilvray. 2006. 'Tsunami and Civil War in Sri Lanka: An Anthropologist Confronts the Real World', *India Review*, 5(3–4): 372–93; Dennis B. McGilvray and Michele R. Gamburd (eds). 2010. *Tsunami Recovery in Sri Lanka: Ethnic and Regional Dimensions*. London and New York: Routledge.

(¹³) National Science Foundation (NSF) Human and Social Dynamics Program, grant no. SES-0525260.

(¹⁴) Kathryn Thurnheer. 2009. 'A House for a Daughter? Constraints and Opportunities in Post-tsunami Eastern Sri Lanka', *Contemporary South Asia*, 17(1): 79–91; S.H. Hasbullah and Benedikt Korf. 2009. 'Muslim Geographies and the Politics of Purification in Sri Lanka after the 2004 Tsunami', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 30(2): 248–64; Dennis B. McGilvray and Patricia Lawrence. 2010. 'Dreaming of Dowry: Post-tsunami Housing Strategies in Eastern Sri Lanka', in Dennis B. McGilvray and Michele R. Gamburd (eds), *Tsunami Recovery in Sri Lanka: Ethnic and Regional Dimensions*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 106–24.

(¹⁵) Selvy Thiruchandran. 1999. *The Other Victims of War: Emergence of Female-headed Households in Eastern Sri Lanka*, vol. 2. New Delhi: Vikas; Kanchana N. Ruwanpura. 2004. 'Dutiful Daughters, Sacrificing Sons: Female-headed

Households in Eastern Sri Lanka', *Domains*, 1: 8-37; Ruwanpura, *Matrilineal Communities*.

(¹⁶) Fieldwork was conducted under a grant from the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies in November 2010, June 2011, and June 2012.

(¹⁷) H.M.Z. Farouque. 1965. 'The Introduction of Muslim Law in Ceylon: An Historical Outline', in *Moors' Islamic Cultural Home 21st Anniversary Souvenir*, Colombo: Moors' Islamic Cultural Home, pp. 14-24; H.M.Z. Farouque. 1986. 'Islamic Law in Sri Lanka: An Historical Survey with Particular Reference to Matrimonial Laws', in M.A.M. Shukri (ed.), *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*, Beruwala: Jamiah Naleemia Institute, pp. 385-414; McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, pp. 129-31.

(¹⁸) Yalman, *Under the Bo Tree*; Thomas R. Trautmann. 1981. *Dravidian Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(¹⁹) Anthony Good. 1980. 'Elder Sister's Daughter Marriage in South Asia', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 36(4): 474-500; Isabelle Clark-Decès. 2011. 'The Decline of Dravidian Kinship in Local Perspectives', in Isabelle Clark-Decès (ed.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, London: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 517-35.

(²⁰) McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, p. 286.

(²¹) The size of my 1971 Muslim marriage survey sample was 174 couples, while the size of my 2011 Muslim marriage survey sample was 40 couples.

(²²) McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict*, p. 285, n. 13.

(²³) Similar love marriages between cross cousins turned up in my survey of Tamil couples. Tom Widger has recently explored this phenomenon among Sinhalese young people. Tom Widger. 2011. 'Cousins in Love: Genealogy, Genes, and Gender amongst Sinhala Buddhist Youth'. Paper presented at the annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, 21-23 October.

(²⁴) All personal names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

(²⁵) David G. Mandelbaum. 1970. *Society in India*, vol. 1, *Continuity and Change*, Part II. Berkeley: University of California Press.

(²⁶) Thiruchandran, *Other Victims of War*; Ruwanpura, 'Dutiful Daughters'; Ruwanpura, *Matrilineal Communities*.

(²⁷) C.Y. Thangarajah. 2003. 'Veiled Constructions: Conflict, Migration and Modernity in Eastern Sri Lanka', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 37(1-2): 141-62.

(²⁸) Patricia Lawrence's research notes from an access to justice baseline survey of households in Batticaloa and Ampara districts, sponsored by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Colombo, 2008, also recorded examples of this overseas-earning strategy by poor Tamil and Moorish women.

(²⁹) In addition to loosely defined *tawhid* preaching, the Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-e-Islami are also active in Akkaraipattu. However, established traditions of popular Sufism and saint veneration also continue to attract followers. See McGilvray, 'Arabs, Moors and Muslims'; Dennis B. McGilvray. 2004. 'Jailani: A Sufi Shrine in Sri Lanka', in Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld (eds), *Lived Islam in South Asia: Adaptation, Accommodation and Conflict*, pp. 273-89. New Delhi: Social Science Press; McGilvray and Lawrence, 'Dreaming of Dowry'.

(³⁰) See the earlier case of Mr Shahabdeen for details. Originally, Hasana's elder sister had been intended for Rijaz, but she eventually received a more favourable marriage offer. Hasana was then substituted as Rijaz's arranged cross-cousin spouse.

(³¹) Yalman, *Under the Bo Tree*; Victor C. de Munck. 1993. *Seasonal Cycles: A Study of Social Change and Continuity in a Sri Lankan Village*. New Delhi and Madras: Asian Educational Services; Victor C. de Munck. 1996. 'Love and Marriage in a Sri Lankan Muslim Community: Toward a Reevaluation of Dravidian Marriage Practices', *American Ethnologist*, 23(4): 698-716.

(³²) Ahamadu Bawa. 1888. 'The Marriage Customs of the Moors of Ceylon', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, 10(36): 219-33; Raihana Raheem. 1975. 'A Study of the Kinship Terms of the Moor Community in Ceylon'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, p. 59.

(³³) Susan Schomberg, personal communication.

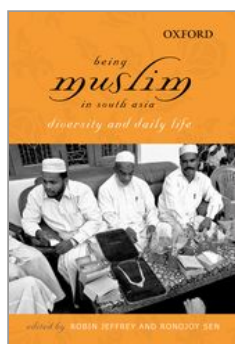
(³⁴) S.H. Hasbullah. 2004. 'Justice for the Dispossessed: The Case of a Forgotten Minority in Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict', in S.H. Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison (eds), *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization: Struggling to Create a New Social Order*, pp. 221-40. New Delhi: SAGE Publications; Sharika Thiranagama. 2011. *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

(³⁵) McGilvray, 'Households in Akkaraipattu', pp. 230-2.

(³⁶) Ruwanpura, *Matrilineal Communities*; Ruwanpura, 'Putting Houses in Place', p. 449.

(³⁷) Patricia Lawrence's research notes from an access to justice baseline survey of households in Batticaloa and Ampara districts.

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The Making of a Diasporic Muslim Family in East Africa

Salim Lakha

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Abstract and Keywords

For many centuries Gujarati Muslims were actively engaged in the Indian Ocean trade which encompassed the mainland of Africa as well as islands off the coast such as Zanzibar. Following the setting up of British and German administrations in eastern Africa from the late 19th century onwards, migration from Gujarat increased substantially. Those migrating to eastern Africa from Gujarat included Hindus from various caste groups and Muslims belonging to different religious communities. Among the Muslims, individuals belonging to the heterodox Khoja Ismaili community had a prominent role in trade even before the setting up of British administration on the mainland. This chapter will examine how trade, community, and empire provided the channels for social and economic mobility in the case of a diasporic Khoja family that originally migrated to eastern Africa from Kathiawad (Gujarat) around the time of the famine in late nineteenth century.

Keywords: Gujarat, Khoja, Ismaili, East Africa, family history, diaspora

Gujaratis are renowned for their mercantile skills and mobility. It is therefore not surprising that they enjoy a ubiquitous presence in the global Indian diaspora. My extended family, the Kassim Lakha clan, for example, now spans five continents with some members exclaiming they even have one of their clansmen living 'down under' in Australia! Considering the family is scattered all over the world, it is difficult to keep track of where certain members reside at any point in time. For example, when I was about to depart on my sabbatical leave to Palo

Alto, California in 2004, I was most surprised to learn that two of my long-lost cousins, Jenny and Azim,¹ lived close by in **(p.117)** Menlo Park. My curiosity was aroused as I had not had any contact with them since my childhood in East Africa. Within 48 hours of my arrival in Palo Alto, Jenny's husband Amir collected me and my wife from our motel to meet Jenny and their daughter, my cousin Azim, and Rafiq, an acquaintance originally from South Africa who also lived in Palo Alto. Soon we all settled down with ease in Jenny and Amir's pleasant courtyard to sample samosas, sip drinks, and share our life stories over the course of a balmy evening. What was striking about this reunion of the three cousins was that despite our lengthy separation and diverse life journeys, kinship bonds and a common heritage still bound us together. We represent the third generation of the Kassim Lakha family born in East Africa, and brought up as Khoja Ismailis, a Muslim community with a very distinct identity and followers of the Aga Khan. To appreciate the significance of this heritage it is necessary to understand its historical and cultural context.

This chapter examines how trade, community, and British rule forged the fortunes of the Kassim Lakha family, who migrated to eastern Africa from Kathiawad, Gujarat in western India. Based partly upon biographical and autobiographical accounts, this case study of the Kassim Lakha family illuminates the significant role of the Khojas in trade in eastern Africa and their cultural adaptation. The Khoja Muslims are renowned for having readily embraced many aspects of modernization during British rule, and for being at the forefront of Westernization among the wider Indian community in East Africa.² The experience of the Kassim Lakha family illustrates this process, underlines their engagement with modernity, and highlights the significance of community in the shaping of diasporic lives in East Africa.

There is quite an extensive scholarly literature on South Asians in East Africa, and a growing number of academic publications on the Khoja Ismailis, but substantial biographies of individual Khoja businessmen and public figures are not common or readily available. There is a part-fictional biography of the famous Ismaili merchant Allidina **(p.118)** Visram,³ and a volume titled *101 Ismaili Heroes* (2003) by Pakistani writer Mumtaz Ali Tajjedin Sadik Ali,⁴ which provides some interesting details on the lives of prominent business and community leaders, but represents a hagiographic study. A personal account by Keshavjee⁵ sheds some light on her grandfather and his family in Kenya. Further, an academic study of a Kenyan businessman Kassam Kanji, by his granddaughter Aneesa, offers some illuminating insights, particularly into the political and personal encounters of her grandfather and, to some extent, the Ismailis in Kenya.⁶ Beyond these few accounts there is not much biographical literature that offers insights into the lives of individual Ismailis or Ismaili families. Consequently, the discussion of the Kassim Lakha family in this chapter is based on scattered information derived from various scholarly and non-

scholarly sources, including autobiographical input and several short articles contributed by my father's elder brother, Abdulrasul Kassim-Lakha.⁷

The chapter begins with the arrival of the Khojas in Zanzibar and a brief explanation of the community's identity. It then focuses on the early settlement of the Kassim Lakha family in Zanzibar and its shift to the mainland of East Africa. The third part explores the family's business expansion, and the final section examines the family's involvement in Ismaili community institutions.

Khoja Ismailis and their Arrival in Zanzibar

The substantial migration and settlement of Indians, predominantly Gujaratis, on the east African mainland, and on the islands **(p.119)** of Zanzibar and Lamu corresponded with the convergence of various events during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the establishment of British and German control in eastern Africa from about 1895. Those migrating to eastern Africa from Gujarat included Muslims belonging to different religious sects such as the Bohras, Memons, and Khojas, as well as Hindus from various caste groups, prominently Bhatias, Lohanas, Patels, and Jains.⁸

The Khojas were early settlers in Zanzibar since they already had a well-established presence in 1820, marked by the existence of an 'organized ... Jamat', that is, a gathering of the followers of the faith.⁹ They originated from Kutch, Kathiawad, and parts of Gujarat which had been brought under British administration during the early nineteenth century, and were converts from the Hindu Lohana caste, whose traditional occupation was trade.¹⁰

They were bestowed with the honorific title of Khwaja (in Persian 'lord'/'master') by the Persian Ismaili missionary Pir Sadr al-Din (around the fifteenth century) who converted them to the Ismaili faith.¹¹ Asani claims that the Khojas were 'strongly influenced by their Indian cultural ancestry'¹² which was evident in their traditional literature and rituals,¹³ while at the same time they shared a 'religious vocabulary' which reflected links with Sufism.¹⁴ A distinctive feature of the Ismaili faith is the emphasis placed upon maintaining a balance between '*din*' (religion) and '*duniya*' (world) where the two are not **(p.120)** mutually exclusive spheres of life but 'intersect and interact', guided by an Islamic ethical context.¹⁵

The heterodox and syncretic character of the Khojas was evident in their early trade practices that included banking from which the more orthodox Muslims refrained since it involved usury.¹⁶ While the Khojas were involved in diverse occupations in Gujarat, including cultivation, the Bombay Gazetteer for Ahmedabad district reported that they were engaged in wholesale and retail trades and appeared 'shrewd, hardworking and thrifty'; they were also classified as 'well-to-do'.¹⁷ Not all Khojas who migrated to Zanzibar came from a

prosperous trading background, but as a community, trade was one of their important occupations.

By 1887 the population of the Khojas in the town of Zanzibar stood at 1,900, well ahead of the other Asian communities which totalled 1,186 persons; only the Hindus with 618 persons and the Bohras with 362 were the other significant groups besides the Khojas.¹⁸ The Khojas dominated numerically even when the Indian population of Zanzibar was combined with that of other areas, including the mainland, which were under the rule of the Sultan of Zanzibar. In 1887 the Khojas numbered 3,398 (or over 53 per cent) out of a total Indian population of 6,345.¹⁹ The period from 1870 to the beginning of the 1900s witnessed a substantial growth of South Asian traders in Zanzibar, expanding from 2,500 to 6,000, with a majority being Muslims while only a small **(p.121)** segment was Hindu.²⁰ Though a detailed time-wise breakdown of the Indian population along lines of religious affiliation is not available in the literature, it is clear from the above statistics that during the latter part of the nineteenth century the Gujarati Muslims, especially the Khojas, were the dominant group of Indian settlers.²¹ The Muslim dominance in terms of settlement during the early years may partly be explained by the ritual restriction against 'overseas travel' among Hindus,²² the influence of which declined with modernization, greater integration into the East African economy, and the passage of time. Further, in the case of Muslims geographical and historical factors also played their part since Gujarati Muslim communities from Kutch and Kathiawad, with their proximity to seaports, were exposed to Indian Ocean trade and cultural influences over many centuries. Traders from these communities in Gujarat had actively participated in the trade with Africa, the Persian Gulf, and other parts of the Middle East.²³ However, during the course of the twentieth century the Gujarati Hindu population in East Africa surpassed that of the Muslims, and by the 1960s the former represented an overwhelming majority, that is, around 70 per cent of the overall Asian population.²⁴ According to Ghai, the Asian population in East Africa in 1970 was between 350,000 and 370,000 persons, which was only under 1.2 per cent of the entire population.²⁵ Their economic influence however far exceeded their population size.

(p.122) In contrast to the Hindus who did not initially bring family members to Zanzibar, the Muslims from the Khoja and the Ithnasheri (a Muslim Shia sect) communities brought their families from the early period of settlement, which may partly explain the demographic predominance of the Khojas.²⁶ Initially, Hindus were restricted in travelling overseas because of the belief that it constituted ritual pollution, and those from the upper castes regarded Africa 'impure', especially where women were concerned.²⁷ The growth in the Khoja population from the mid-nineteenth century onwards is also attributed to several other factors related to conditions in India. Among the important push factors accounting for migration to Zanzibar were the repeated droughts and famines in Kutch and Kathiawad, combined with the fall of employment in local handicraft

industries²⁸ in the face of competition from imported goods, and later, mechanized Indian production. These famines, which occurred during 1896–7 and 1899–1900 in Gujarat, resulted in widespread shortage of food and claimed many lives.²⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century starvation, combined with diseases like dysentery and cholera, resulted, according to Boyd, in ‘utter destitution’, and the administration of the Bombay Presidency was unable to deal with the situation in a satisfactory manner.³⁰ Consequently, many from Gujarat were forced to search for better prospects across the Indian Ocean.

Combined with the push factors there were other major influences during the second half of nineteenth century that drew the Khojas and other Indians to East Africa. The rise of Zanzibar as a trading centre by the middle of nineteenth century, together with the a growing British influence over Zanzibar and the Indian Ocean created propitious conditions for Indian traders who had already obtained a foothold in the region.³¹ The British encouraged Indian traders to **(p. 123)** participate in commercial activities in the region and once the British established their consulate in Zanzibar in 1841 this support was further strengthened.³² Further, the introduction of steam shipping between India and Zanzibar in 1873 on a monthly basis provided an additional spurt to migration.³³ According to Amiji, a large expansion in the Khoja population in Zanzibar occurred from the late 1850s to 1870s, which coincided with the commercial growth of Zanzibar.³⁴ While this initial rise in Khoja population preceded the famines mentioned above, their population expanded substantially both through migration and natural increase following the famines and from the beginning of the twentieth century. Importantly for the Khojas, their Imam Sultan Mohamed Shah (Aga Khan III) also advised them to ‘seek economic opportunities in East Africa’.³⁵

The prominent role of the Khojas in trade in Zanzibar and on the mainland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued despite serious dissension and splits within the community in Bombay in 1866 and 1908, and in Zanzibar in 1899.³⁶ The source of these splits was mainly over the role and authority of the Aga Khan. According to Mehta, the Ismailis commanded both numbers and ‘great prestige in the business world of East Africa’ at the time.³⁷ Pioneers such as Sir Tharia Topan, Sewa Haji Paroo, Allidina Visram, my great grandfather Kassim Lakha, and a few others who were from Kutch and Kathiawad were linked to each other through business ties, with some enjoying close relations with the Arab rulers of Zanzibar.³⁸

Amongst these men, Sir Tharia Topan and Allidina Visram gained considerable fame, fortune, and prestige through their trading activities and close connections as advisers to the rulers of Zanzibar. Sir Tharia Topan (1823–1891), who was regarded as ‘The King of the Ivory Trade’ in Zanzibar, had an illustrious lineage since **(p.124)** he claimed descent from Seth Topan, a close associate of Maharao Khengar (1510–1585), the ruler of Kutch.³⁹ Seth Topan was a convert

to the Ismaili faith from the Hindu Bhatia caste whose members were traders.⁴⁰ His descendant, Tharia Topan, however, was raised in humble circumstances in Kutch since the fortunes of his ancestors had declined considerably over generations. After arriving in Zanzibar in 1835 as a stowaway, and working as a 'scribe' in the firm of the prominent Hindu businessman Jairam Shivji, he experienced a considerable rise in his fortunes when he became the island's customs collector during 1875–80.⁴¹ Tharia Topan was highly respected by British officials and explorers, whose expeditions he financed and provisioned, as did other leading Indian merchants.⁴² For his assistance to the British in ending slavery he was awarded a knighthood in 1890.⁴³ His special status within Zanzibar's ruling elite, combined with his leadership of the Khojas, greatly aided the commercial efforts of the community.⁴⁴

Another renowned Khoja businessman noted for his considerable commercial acumen was Allidina Visram (1863–1916) who also originated from Kutch, arriving in Zanzibar as a young boy in 1877⁴⁵ where he initially worked for a prominent Khoja Kutchi businessman, Sewa Haji Paroo.⁴⁶ Later, Visram set up stores of his own far into the mainland and financed the infamous slave trade in East Africa, as did some of his other Indian counterparts.⁴⁷ Described as the 'leading merchant in East Africa', his entry further inland to Uganda even **(p. 125)** preceded the railways.⁴⁸ By the first two decades of the twentieth century his diverse commercial networks stretched all the way from Bombay to encompass many parts of East Africa, as well as the Congo and Ethiopia.⁴⁹ For his entrepreneurship he gained widespread respect from the Indian community, and even the African elite in Uganda.⁵⁰ His legacy included also the promotion of education since he established the Allidina Visram High School in Mombasa, Kenya.

The considerable contributions of Sir Tharia Topan and Allidina Visram to the Khoja community received recognition from the Imams of the time, Imam Hasan Ali Shah and Imam Sultan Mohamed Shah (Aga Khan III) respectively, who awarded them the honorific title of Varas.⁵¹ Sir Tharia Topan, apart from his other services, had served as the *mukhi* or head of the *jamat* in Zanzibar for a year. Similarly, Visram had made a generous contribution to the building of a *jamatkhana* in Kisumu (a port on Lake Victoria in Kenya), as well as followed the advice of Aga Khan III to aid poorer Khojas from Kathiawad to settle in Zanzibar.⁵² Their contributions to the welfare of the community were in keeping with the tradition of voluntary service to the Imam and the *jamat*.

This tradition of volunteering continues with enthusiasm and considerable vigour in contemporary times among the Khojas on the subcontinent and in East Africa as well as amongst those from the community who have migrated to Western countries. The following account of the Kassim Lakha family illustrates

service to the community combined with the pursuit of material progress which is characteristic of many Khoja Ismailis.

Beginnings: From Zanzibar to the Mainland

The migration of my great grandfather Kassim (1853–1910) to Zanzibar in 1871 had many parallels with the experiences of other Khojas like Tharia Topan and Allidina Visram. In Zanzibar he followed in the **(p.126)** footsteps of Visram in his quest to establish a new home across the ocean from where he was born. According to Seidenberg, the ‘rags-to-riches’ transformation of the Kassim Lakha family was ‘archetypal’ of others in East Africa.⁵³ My great grandfather’s father, Lakha, originated from a village close to Jamnagar in Kathiawad where he was a small cultivator.⁵⁴ Though my great grandfather originally migrated from the Gujarati-speaking region of Kathiawad, in East Africa the family spoke the Kutchi language, thus sharing the heritage of Kutch with many of the Khojas from Zanzibar. In his biographical account, Ali claims that Kassim’s family was severely affected by the famine,⁵⁵ so to escape these poverty-stricken conditions he migrated with other Ismailis to Zanzibar.⁵⁶ Like other Khoja men, he was soon joined by his female relatives, namely, his wife Ratanbai, and his mother.⁵⁷

My great grandfather was initially employed by Sultan Syed Barghash to organize food and tents for expeditions departing for the mainland.⁵⁸ Following this assignment he moved to the island of Lamu around 1883, while still working for the Sultan. Sometime during his stay in Lamu he started his own business by opening a small general store.⁵⁹ By then his family had expanded to include several children, both boys and girls.⁶⁰

His secular, unorthodox view of learning was demonstrated in his choice of education for his boys in Lamu. He recruited a Hindu Brahmin teacher by the name of Raval from Zanzibar to teach them **(p.127)** to read and write, but they were also sent to a madrasa to learn the Quran. Additionally, they attended the Khoja community’s religious school to acquire a knowledge of the *ginans*,⁶¹ which are a central component of the community’s ‘literary heritage’, and normally ‘recited’ or ‘sung’⁶² to a particular raga in *jamatkhanas* every day wherever in the world the Khojas reside. Although the secular education imparted to my grandfather and his brothers did not extend beyond the early primary level,⁶³ among the third generation of the family in East Africa, to which I belong, the pursuit of higher university level education became a prime objective.

In Lamu, my great grandfather gained in social stature since he was appointed *mukhi* of the small *jamat* there.⁶⁴ As *mukhi* he was considered the leader of the Khoja community in Lamu and recognized as such by the British district commissioner.

Some years later, in 1898, he shifted to Mombasa, Kenya, where he worked as a manager in an import-export firm owned by Allidina Visram which was engaged in trade with India.⁶⁵ Not content with staying in Mombasa, he moved inland to Kisumu where he continued in the employment of Visram, and supervised 'all of Allidina Visram's shops in Kenya and Uganda'⁶⁶ until he died in 1910. Further, he had set up two shops for himself in Mombasa and Kisumu that were operated by his four sons, Mohamed, Hassan, Rahemtulla, and Alibhai, my grandfather.⁶⁷ The eldest, Mohamed, was also employed by Visram's business for sometime in Kisumu. My great grandfather's career was therefore closely tied to Visram's businesses and patronage, underlining the importance of community networks in the business history of the Khojas in East Africa.⁶⁸

During his time in Kisumu my great grandfather (Kassim) gained significant recognition for his public service, especially his **(p.128)** contribution in helping to eradicate a plague epidemic that afflicted the town in 1905. His presence in the town, where two of his sons Mohamed and Rahemtulla had settled, was commemorated by his four sons, who had a clock tower built in his memory. The clock tower, now 'a landmark', occupying a central location in the town, had its plaque 'unveiled' by Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the colony's governor, in 1938.⁶⁹ The event was reported in the *Standard* newspaper (26 August 1938), which stated that the governor's 'short speech' acknowledged Kassim Lakha's 'notable enterprise and ability'.⁷⁰ Further, the paper commended Kassim Lakha's 'assistance in stamping out' the plague 'regardless' of the risk it posed to his own health.

The clock tower in Kisumu was not the only monument displaying the family's links with the British administration. At the time of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, the Kassim Lakha family donated a clock tower to the city of Kampala, Uganda, in recognition of the occasion. Despite the expulsion of Asians in 1972 from Uganda and the ravages of Idi Amin's regime, the clock tower still stands in one of the city's major landmarks.

Expansion of the Family Business

Following the death of my great grandfather, Kassim, in 1910, his four sons, including my grandfather Alibhai, extended their father's business interests across East Africa, particularly in Kenya and Uganda. The eldest, Mohamed, left his employment with Allidina Visram's firm and set out independently with his brothers to start a business that involved the purchase of various agricultural products and hides and skins to be sold initially to European businesses in Kisumu for export.⁷¹ The brothers set up stores all around Lake Victoria in Kenya and Tanganyika (now Tanzania), for the purchase of various commodities, and employed Khoja families to run them.⁷² Significantly, over time **(p.129)** the family business made a transition from trade to industrial processing, with investments in cotton ginning and a coffee-curing factory outside Kampala which was the 'largest' factory in Uganda.⁷³ In 1915, Hassan, the youngest of the

brothers, who was working for a British firm, Boustead & Clark, left the company to enter the cotton business.⁷⁴ Within three years the family had set up several ginneries in Uganda. Then in 1919 Mohamed set up a ginnery in Samia in western Kenya, in partnership with a Captain Gordon Small. The ginnery operated under the name Small & Company, retaining that name even after Small sold his share of the business to the Kassim Lakha family.

A striking feature of the Kassim Lakha investments in cotton ginneries was their remote locations, underlining the extraction of commodities by Indian commercial enterprises deep in the hinterland of East Africa. These ginneries purchased cotton from small-scale African producers and processed it in the ginneries. The cotton was brought by foot or on bicycles to the ginneries or to one of the many small depots spread throughout the interior. One of the ginneries that I visited on a few occasions with my parents and uncle Abdulrasul and his family was the one located in Samia (western Kenya). It was extremely isolated, and the closest settlement to which it was connected by an unsealed road was Sio-Port, a small place that was a relatively short drive from the ginnery. The ginnery was set in a compound surrounded by bush, with the accommodation lacking electric lighting, relying mainly on kerosene lamps. Needless to say, working there for up to six months during the cotton season was regarded by various family members as a hardship assignment, especially with mosquitoes presenting a major health hazard in the isolated settlement. I remember my father, Sadrudin, suffering a serious bout of malaria as a consequence. The ginnery's isolation and threat of malaria, however, did not daunt my uncle Abdulrasul, who reminded us that his forebears had travelled all over the interior riding a bicycle.

As the business enterprises of the Kassim Lakha family and other Indians demonstrate, the economic role of Indians in East Africa was not confined, as is commonly imagined, to running retail shops, **(p.130)** though that sector was dominated by them during the colonial period. Their foray into industrial production was a significant feature of the colonial economy. For example, the statistics for Uganda show that by 1938 the number of ginneries owned by Indian firms far surpassed those owned by British or European owners.⁷⁵

By the late 1950s and early 1960s the family had considerably diversified its business interests and established 'approximately fifty businesses' that were located mainly in East Africa, but they also invested in jute mills in Bangladesh, and made some investments in Canada and the United Kingdom.⁷⁶ This extensive family business network in East Africa comprised cotton ginneries, coffee processing, luxury hotels in Kampala and Mombasa, a bakery in Nairobi, and a farm outside Mombasa amongst other enterprises. Since the enterprises were run mainly by the extended family members there was no shortage of manpower. However, some of the enterprises such as the jute mill in Bangladesh had other shareholders besides the Kassim Lakha family. The second generation

of the family, including my father, his brothers, and their cousins were all recruited to manage and operate the various enterprises.

The prominent status of the Kassim Lakha family in the business sector was reflected in its participation in politics and in business associations representing Indian commercial interests. Notable among them was Mohamed Kassim Lakha, one of the leaders of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Eastern Africa set up in 1932 to oppose the discriminatory marketing legislation proposed by the colonial administration for Uganda and Tanzania.⁷⁷ He also founded the Indian Merchants' Chamber and the Indian Association of Kisumu, which together with other Indian associations represented the 'grievances' of Indians to both the colonial government in India and the British government.⁷⁸ When **(p.131)** Sarojini Naidu was invited in 1923 to the East African Indian National Congress meeting in Mombasa to address Indian concerns in East Africa, Mohamed, who was one of the delegates at the meeting, was asked to translate her speech that was delivered in English.⁷⁹ Notably, Mohamed was nominated a member of the Legislative Council in Kenya in 1923, and his brother Rahemtulla also gained a seat in the Legislative Council.⁸⁰

The next generation of the Kassim Lakha family continued this tradition of commercial and political participation. Mohamed Kassim Lakha's nephews, my uncles Abdulrasul and Gulamhussein (sons of Alibhai Kassim Lakha), were both actively engaged in public life. My uncle Abdulrasul occupied various positions on commercial boards, including as chairman of the Kenya Cotton Association (1963–76), and vice-chairman of the Kenya Sisal Board from 1974 to 1978.⁸¹ His brother Gulamhussein was appointed by the governor of Kenya as a member of the Cotton Lint and Seed Marketing Board for a period of three years from 1 July 1961 to represent ginneries in the Nyanza Province.⁸² He was also a member of parliament in Uganda for 11 years from 1960 onwards until Idi Amin deposed President Milton Obote in a coup in January 1971 and amended the constitution. Since my uncle belonged to the Uganda People's Congress which was the party of the country's then president Milton Obote, my uncle's life was under constant danger during the three months over which Asians were expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin in August 1972.⁸³ By the **(p.132)** mid-1970s, the family experienced a waning of its business fortunes following the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, the conflict between East and West Pakistan, and also serious dissension within the Kassim Lakha family itself, which witnessed the children of the four brothers, Mohamed, Rahemtullah, Alibhai, and Hassan go their own ways. Significant changes in direction of the Kassim Lakha family can be seen in the third generation to which I belong, who were not drawn into the family business network, but instead moved out into professional occupations or entered business with others outside the family. The increasing political instability in East Africa combined with new professional opportunities abroad

witnessed the emigration of many family members to Europe, mainly France, Belgium, Canada, and the United States.

A distinct feature of the third generation of the family was the pursuit of university educational qualifications and professional careers. My grandfather, Alibhai Kassim Lakha was an ardent believer in the value of education. On holiday visits to his residence in Mombasa I was usually ushered in front of him for a lengthy discourse on the importance of education for material success. The emphasis upon higher education was in keeping with the broader trend within the Khoja Ismaili community. It was encouraged particularly under the guidance of the current Imam, Aga Khan IV, who is a graduate of Harvard University. However, the Aga Khan III also vigorously promoted education among his followers, including for women, who were encouraged to adopt Western dress and pursue learning.⁸⁴ The emphasis on learning was evident in the network of Aga Khan primary and secondary schools that were set up in urban centres in East Africa where I acquired my school education.⁸⁵ The provision of **(p.133)** modern education through these schools, together with other initiatives in health, housing, and credit facilities were major features of modernization of the community in East Africa.⁸⁶ The use of English as a medium of instruction at the Aga Khan schools I attended in Nairobi (Kenya) was vigorously pursued, with some emphasis on French as a second language. At secondary school most of my teachers were either Christian Goans or British, reflecting the multicultural background of the teaching staff. The school curriculum was in keeping with the requirements of the Cambridge School Certificate exams at secondary school level, followed by the Higher School Certificate for entry to university. This meant considerable emphasis was placed upon the effective delivery of secular education.

However, not all my young relatives attended the Aga Khan schools, with some attending secular Indian schools in Nairobi, and others acquiring their schooling at British public schools. Most male cousins, and some female ones, went on to universities in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States where they obtained undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Thus, my cousin Azim trained as a dental surgeon in the United States, and my cousin Jenny attended the American University in Beirut. Similarly, I acquired my undergraduate and postgraduate education in the United Kingdom, and Australia where I obtained my doctoral qualification. However, the first person in the family to acquire a postgraduate qualification was my first cousin Shamsh, uncle Abdulrasul's son, who graduated with a master's in business administration from the University of Minnesota.

Family Engagement within the Community

Following graduation, Shamsh managed a jute mill in Khulna, East Pakistan, until the conflict between East and West Pakistan, and later went on to have a distinguished career as the founding president of the Aga Khan University and

Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan. His competent role in setting up the university, which involved a very close working relationship with the Aga Khan, gained him and the Kassim Lakha family considerable prestige, especially within the Ismaili **(p.134)** community. Importantly, his contribution to the field of education also received international recognition when he was awarded an honorary doctorate from McMaster University in Canada in 1984, and granted the award of Officer in the French National Order of Merit from President Chirac in 2001.⁸⁷

The role of Shamsh in the establishment of the Aga Khan University was part of a continuing tradition within the Kassim Lakha family of involvement in community institutions. However, in contrast to the paid professional position held by Shamsh, many members of the family had previously contributed their services on a voluntary basis across a range of institutions that were integral to the functioning of the community, and in implementing the directives of the Aga Khan. Some notable examples in the family, beginning with my great grandfather Kassim Lakha, who was the *mukhi* of Lamu *jamat*, confirm a long-standing and continuous engagement in community affairs in East Africa. This was underlined by the attendance at the milestone Evian conference in France in 1952 by three members of the family, namely, uncle Abdulrasul, my grandfather Alibhai, and his brother Hassan. An outcome of the conference convened by Aga Khan III, which included Ismaili leaders from Africa, was the introduction of a new constitution in 1954 that restructured various Ismaili institutions with the aim of modernizing the community's social and cultural outlook.⁸⁸

My grandfather's brother Hassan Kassim Lakha (1892–1982) who attended the Evian conference played an extensive and prominent role in the community's affairs in East Africa, and to some extent, beyond Africa. His contribution was 'diverse and distinguished' since he was involved in many different roles in the economic institutions of the community, as honorary secretary and president of the Ismaili council in Uganda, and as a trustee of the East African Muslim Welfare Society, of which Aga Khan III was a founding member.⁸⁹ In recognition of his **(p.135)** business expertise he was appointed director of the Jubilee Insurance Company Ltd and Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust Ltd⁹⁰ which extended credit at low interest rates for business and housing to Ismailis in East Africa.⁹¹ As a long-time businessman with interests and knowledge of the cotton industry, he was also sent by Aga Khan III to Syria in 1955 to assist the Ismaili community there in 'improving' cotton cultivation and establishing better marketing facilities.⁹²

Both Hassan Kassim Lakha and my grandfather, Alibhai, were awarded the high-ranking title of 'Count' by Aga Khan III in recognition of their services to the community. For his philanthropy and voluntary services, Hassan Kassim Lakha was honoured several times by the Imams of the time.⁹³ This included a private visit by Aga Khan IV in 1962 to Hassan Kassim Lakha's plush residence located

in the salubrious suburb of Kalolo, Kampala (Uganda). I was present at the time, together with a small gathering of relatives, where the Aga Khan granted a fairly long audience to those gathered and spoke individually to a few of the family members there. It was indeed a rare event!

What is distinctive in the migratory experience of the Kassim Lakha family is its continuing diasporic narrative. It is a narrative marked by a double displacement: first from the Indian subcontinent and then East Africa. The encounter with my two cousins in California represents one strand in that narrative. It was a revelatory encounter because it brought into sharp relief the common heritage that united us. There are several strands running through this heritage. A defining feature of the family's identity is the status it has gained over several generations through its service and involvement in the institutions of the Khoja Ismaili community. Another is through the joint family businesses, which were for long the bedrock of the family's social and economic status, and a significant source of shared memories and experiences. **(p.136)** Thus, during a casual conversation with my cousin Azim in California, he suddenly enquired whether I recalled the remoteness and complete isolation of our cotton ginneries which he had also visited in his childhood. I was surprised it had such an enduring impact on his recollection of the past, as it had on mine. Similarly, on my regular visits to Vancouver to see my mother and various other members of the extended family who now reside in Canada, it is not uncommon to reminisce fondly about the holidays we spent at our Oceanic Hotel in Mombasa on the coast of Kenya. A shared history has proven a powerful source in uniting relatives scattered across different continents.

While memory, kinship bonds, and a shared history of life in East Africa exerts a strong influence in binding various members of the Kassim Lakha family, the same could not be claimed where ties to Gujarat or India are concerned. When references to 'back home' are made in casual conversation with other people, these normally refer to East Africa. There is a relationship with Gujarat and India that is affective but it is more distant and complex. Very few Khojas from East Africa that I knew had property or family members in India. Those who did, or still do, may occasionally visit them but 'home' now is wherever they currently reside, be it Canada, United Kingdom, East Africa, or elsewhere. This does not completely exclude ties with India. Two of my first cousins from the Kassim Lakha family have married women from India. My cousin Shamsh married a Parsi woman from Mumbai who had converted to Ismaili faith and Zul was married to a Khoja Ismaili lady also from Mumbai. Neither of the two cousins settled in India nor have their children who are spread across Canada, the United States, and Europe. And Shamsh lived with his family for many years in Pakistan, he now moves between there and Canada, while Zul lives in

Belgium. I would argue it is their business interests and professional careers that have defined their residence rather than marriage or family origins.

If being diasporic means having a 'collective memory' of an 'original homeland' or considering 'their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home' and 'as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return',⁹⁴ then the Kassim Lakha family or **(p.137)** many of the Khojas from East Africa elude that definition. Similarly, Twamley's Gujarati informants in the United Kingdom whose parents were from East Africa claimed that the identification of their parents with India was much weaker compared to East Africa. Revealingly, one informant stated that when holidaying in India the family was uninterested 'in visiting Gujarat' as they had no familial links or any memories of the region, but like all tourists they made a trip to the Taj Mahal.⁹⁵ As in the case of other Indian diasporic communities such as the Indo-Fijians,⁹⁶ there is no clear recollection and perpetuation of the history of migration from India among the East African Khojas or that of their family histories in Gujarat. However, a longing to return to 'ancestral homeland' or to one's roots may severely constrict what constitutes a diaspora, and instead, other considerations like 'boundary-maintenance' in order to preserve 'a distinctive identity' in relation to 'a host society' may be more applicable to certain communities.⁹⁷ Here endogamy is the most pertinent feature of boundary-maintenance.⁹⁸ In that respect both the Khojas and other Indian communities in East Africa strictly practised endogamy and restricted social interaction with the host community, that is, the native Africans.⁹⁹ While endogamy may not be practised as strictly by the descendants of those who subsequently migrated to the West, it is still a preference among many first-generation Khoja migrants in the West. Nevertheless, my observations of the younger people in the community in Canada, where many East African Khojas migrated to from 1970s onwards, reveal that cross-cultural marriages are not uncommon regardless of **(p.138)** the parents' views or opinions. These involve marriages with partners from other Indian or Asian communities as well as with those from European backgrounds.

Though a longing to return to ancestral Gujarat was not an important feature of the Khoja diaspora in East Africa, it did not exclude cultural engagement with Gujarat and the Indian subcontinent more generally. This engagement occurred through both religious and other cultural practices. As mentioned above, the singing of *ginans* in the Gujarati language (and other South Asian languages) in *jamatkhanas* is a key feature of religious practice. Similarly *gits* (songs in appreciation of the Imam) which are recited in Gujarati, Hindi, Sindhi, and Punjabi, combined with traditional Gujarati dances, are a regular feature of religious and social occasions in East Africa and in the West, though over time *gits* have been transformed through the migratory experience.¹⁰⁰ From my observation over many years in Melbourne, Australia, the performance of *dandiya raas* (Gujarati or Indian dances) is common on auspicious occasions after prayers when members of the Khoja community from East Africa and the

subcontinent enthusiastically participate in these dances. I remember on one visit to Paris in the late 1960s witnessing the *raas* being performed there by Khoja migrants and students from Madagascar and East Africa to mark an auspicious occasion. Needless to state, serving Indian food is a regular accompaniment to the *gits* and the dances. The perpetuation of these cultural practices by Khojas across continents underlines the strong and enduring cultural identification with Gujarat and India regardless of whether they were born there or have lived there.

Kutchi and Gujarati languages are still spoken in many homes in East Africa as well as in the West where many East African Khojas emigrated. Both my nephews, who were born in Canada and brought up there, can converse in Kutchi. Indian food is equally important and a fairly regular feature of the diet among community members who have migrated from East Africa to Canada and elsewhere. Hindi songs and Bollywood movies have pride of place in popular culture **(p.139)** among friends and family members, especially of my generation. On my regular visits to Canada to meet my family, it is common for friends and family to entertain me with Bollywood videos or to be given recordings of old and contemporary Hindi film songs. Even my nephews include contemporary Indian music in their cosmopolitan collection of songs and instrumental tunes. I detect a rising interest in India among some of my friends and family who have settled in Canada and who have visited the country as tourists in recent years. I am also struck by the popularity in Canada of fashionable salwar kameez for social occasions among Khoja women from East Africa, who when living there, expressed little interest in the attire.

At an intellectual level, those in the community who have pursued academic studies in humanities and the social sciences have also explored aspects of the Khoja Ismaili faith as practised on the subcontinent or investigated development issues connected with India and Pakistan. In my opinion, the engagement of the community with India and more widely with the subcontinent is likely to continue for various reasons, and importantly is reinforced by the extensive activities of the Aga Khan network in the region. The network's involvement in the provision of education, health services, and agricultural development especially in India and Pakistan is well publicized both within and outside the community. At the same time East African Khojas in the West are increasingly coming into contact with their Khoja counterparts from the Indian subcontinent who have migrated there. These contacts may also reinforce and reinvigorate the former's cultural and non-cultural links with the subcontinent.

The third generation of the Kassim Lakha family has transitioned from a regional diaspora to a global diaspora. Their cultural capital¹⁰¹ manifested through educational attainment facilitated their integration into the economies of the countries they relocated to, especially Canada and the United States as well as France.¹⁰² Though **(p.140)** this transition was disruptive, resulting in a

substantial loss of assets (in common with many other Khojas) it was eased by their early engagement with modernity. A notable feature of this engagement for the Khoja community was that it was negotiated without deep anxiety about their identity. Modernization and Westernization did not diminish their institutions, communal bonds, or a sense of pride in their identity. *Jamatkhanas* and national Ismaili councils sprouted wherever they relocated. While individual dissenters express disaffection from time to time, the large body of the community has remained committed to its faith and identity. The leading role of the Imam (Aga Khan IV) in guiding the community¹⁰³ and interpreting the faith according to the demands of the time is one explanatory factor for the community's adaptation to changing circumstances. To quote Aga Khan III: 'Ismailism has survived because it has always been fluid. Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules, even the set of regulations known as Holy Laws are directions as to method and procedure and not detailed orders about results to be obtained.'¹⁰⁴

Other South Asian communities in East Africa also had to negotiate their engagement with modernity and transition to countries beyond East Africa in their own ways. What distinguishes the experience of the Kassim Lakha family and Khoja Ismailis is the flexible outlook articulated above by Aga Khan III, and continued under the present Aga Khan IV since 1957, combined with the dense community networks or social capital that they have reproduced¹⁰⁵ and that shapes their lives in different diasporic contexts.

Notes:

(¹) Azim is my first cousin, the son of my father's younger brother Tajjdin. Jenny (who passed away in September 2012) was my second cousin. She was the daughter of my father's first cousin Daulat who was the daughter of Hassan Kassim Lakha, a prominent figure in the Khoja Ismaili community in East Africa.

(²) J.S. Mangat. 1969. *A History of the Asians in East Africa c. 1886 to 1945*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 175.

(³) Dana April Seidenberg. 1996. *Mercantile Adventurers: The World of East African Asians 1750-1985*. New Delhi: New Age International, p. 65.

(⁴) Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. *101 Ismaili Heroes*, vol. 1, *Late 19th Century to Present Age*. Karachi: Islamic Book Publishers. Available online at <http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/20664> (accessed on 12 December 2012).

(⁵) Shariffa Keshavjee. 2005. *Bwana Mzuri: Memories of Hasham Jamal, A Pioneer in Kisumu*. Nairobi: Executive Printers.

(⁶) Aneesa Kassam. 2009. 'In Search of the Good Life: Life-History of a Kenyan Indian Settler. A Sartrean Approach to Biography and History', *History and Anthropology*, 20(4): 435-57.

(⁷) Cynthia Salvadori (compiler). 2000. *We Came in Dhows*, 3 vols. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited.

(⁸) Makrand Mehta. 2001. 'Gujarati Business Communities in East African Diaspora: Major Historical Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(20): 1738-47.

(⁹) Hatim M. Amiji. 1971. 'Some Notes on Religious Dissent in Nineteenth-Century East Africa', *African Historical Studies*, 4(3): 603-16, see p. 605.

(¹⁰) Ali S. Asani. 2001. 'The Khojahs of South Asia: Defining a Space of Their Own', *Cultural Dynamics*, 13(2): 155-68, see p. 155; Azim Nanji. 1999. *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*. Delmar: Caravan Books, p. 74.

(¹¹) Nanji, *Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, p. 74.

(¹²) Asani, 'Khojahs of South Asia', p. 156.

(¹³) Nanji, *Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 7-21.

(¹⁴) Asani, 'Khojahs of South Asia', p. 156.

(¹⁵) Malise Ruthven. 2011. 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions', in Farhad Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History of the Ismailis: Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community*, pp. 189-220. London: I. B. Tauris and Co., p. 191.

(¹⁶) M.N. Pearson. 1976. *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 27.

(¹⁷) Bombay Government. 1879. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 4, Ahmedabad. Bombay: Bombay Government, p. 41.

(¹⁸) Robert G. Gregory. 1971. *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire 1890-1939*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 37; Carmen Voigt-Graf. 1998. *Asian Communities in Tanzania: A Journey through Past and Present Times*. Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, p. 32.

(¹⁹) Gregory, *India and East Africa*, p. 37.

(²⁰) Gijsbert Oonk. 2005. 'Gujarati Business Communities in East Africa: Success and Failure Stories', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(20): 2077-81, p. 2078.

(²¹) Mehta, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 1742.

(²²) Gijbert Oonk. 2006. 'East Africa', in Brij V. Lal (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora*, pp. 254–61. Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Paris: Editions Didier Millet.

(²³) Kenneth McPherson. 1993. *The Indian Ocean: A History of the People and the Sea*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 78, 190.

(²⁴) Agehananda Bharati. 1970. 'A Social Survey', in Dharam P. Ghai and Yash P. Ghai (eds), *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–67.

(²⁵) Dharam P. Ghai. 1970. 'An Economic Survey', in Dharam P. Ghai and Yash P. Ghai (eds), *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, pp. 98–127.

(²⁶) Oonk, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 2078.

(²⁷) Oonk, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 2078.

(²⁸) Amiji, 'Some Notes', p. 606.

(²⁹) Kassam, 'In Search', p. 443.

(³⁰) Cited in John Mattausch. 1998. 'From Subjects to Citizens: British 'East African Asians'', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24(1): 127.

(³¹) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, pp. 3–5.

(³²) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 3.

(³³) Amiji, 'Some Notes', p. 606.

(³⁴) Amiji, 'Some Notes', p. 606.

(³⁵) Kassam, 'In Search', p. 443.

(³⁶) Asani, 'Khojahs of South Asia', pp. 159–60; Amiji, 'Some Notes', pp. 609, 612.

(³⁷) Mehta, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 1742.

(³⁸) Mehta, 'Gujarati Business Communities', p. 1742.

(³⁹) Mumtaz Ali Tajjadin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Tharia Topan', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at <http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/20763> (accessed on 8 March 2011).

(⁴⁰) Ali, 'Tharia Topan'.

- (⁴¹) Ali, 'Tharia Topan'; Gregory, *India and East Africa*, p. 39.
- (⁴²) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 20.
- (⁴³) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, pp. 20–1.
- (⁴⁴) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 20.
- (⁴⁵) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 51.
- (⁴⁶) Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Alidina Visram', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at <http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/20666> (accessed on 8 September 2011).
- (⁴⁷) Oonk, 'East Africa', p. 254.
- (⁴⁸) Oonk, 'East Africa', p. 255.
- (⁴⁹) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, pp. 76–81.
- (⁵⁰) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 81.
- (⁵¹) Ali, 'Tharia Topan'; Ali, 'Alidina Visram'.
- (⁵²) Ali, 'Alidina Visram'.
- (⁵³) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁵⁴) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁵⁵) In the biographical account of her grandfather, Kassam also claims that the drought of 1899–1900 (and consequent deprivation) was a major consideration in prompting her grandfather and other Indians to migrate to East Africa. Kassam, 'In Search', p. 443.
- (⁵⁶) Mumtaz Ali Tajjdin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at <http://www.ismaili.net/Source/mumtaz/Heroes1/hero042.html> (accessed on 29 August 2011).
- (⁵⁷) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁵⁸) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁵⁹) Abdulrasul A. Kassim-Lakha. 2000. 'The Sultan's Aide-de-Camp', in Cynthia Salvadori (compiler), *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 1. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, pp. 26–7.
- (⁶⁰) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁶¹) Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

- (⁶²) Nanji, *Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, pp. 6–9.
- (⁶³) Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.
- (⁶⁴) Kassim-Lakha, 'The Sultan's Aide-de-Camp', p. 27.
- (⁶⁵) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁶⁶) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁶⁷) Seidenberg, *Mercantile Adventurers*, p. 37.
- (⁶⁸) Kassam, 'In Search', p. 445.
- (⁶⁹) Keshavjee, *Bwana Mzuri*, p. 41.
- (⁷⁰) Salvadori, *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 3, p. 162.
- (⁷¹) Abdulrasul A. Kassim-Lakha. 2000. 'Cotton in Kavirondo', in Cynthia Salvadori (compiler), *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 2. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, pp. 152–3.
- (⁷²) Kassim-Lakha, 'Cotton in Kavirondo', pp. 152–3.
- (⁷³) Robert G. Gregory. 1993. *South Asians in East Africa: An Economic and Social History 1890-1980*. Boulder: Westview Press, p. 282.
- (⁷⁴) Kassim-Lakha, 'Cotton in Kavirondo', p. 153.
- (⁷⁵) R.R. Ramchandani. 1976. *Uganda Asians: The End of an Enterprise*. Bombay: United Asia Publications, pp. 132–5.
- (⁷⁶) Robert G. Gregory. 1992. *The Rise and Fall of Philanthropy in East Africa*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, p. 78.
- (⁷⁷) Mangat, *History of the Asians*, p. 156; Gregory, *India and East Africa*, p. 453.
- (⁷⁸) Abdulrasul A. Kassim-Lakha. 2000. 'Plague & Politics in Kisumu', in Cynthia Salvadori (compiler), *We Came in Dhows*, vol. 3. Nairobi: Paperchase Kenya Limited, pp. 162–3.
- (⁷⁹) Kassim-Lakha, 'Plague & Politics in Kisumu', p. 163.
- (⁸⁰) Keshavjee, *Bwana Mzuri*, p. 41.
- (⁸¹) Mumtaz Ali Tajjadin Sadik Ali. 2003. 'Abdulrasul Kassim-Lakha, Wazir', *101 Ismaili Heroes*, available online at <http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/20665> (accessed 27 June 2011).

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(⁸³) Email communication dated 16–17 October 2011 with my cousin Zul Kassim-Lakha (son of Gulamhussein Kassim-Lakha) who now resides in Belgium. On the expulsion of Ugandan Asians, refer to Mohamed M. Keshavjee. 2012. 'The Ugandan Asian Expulsion and Its Place in the Evolution of the Gujarati Diaspora', in Sharmina Mawani and Anjoom Mukadam (eds), *Gujarati Communities across the Globe: Memory, Identity and Continuity*, pp. 13–26. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

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(⁸⁹) Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

(⁹⁰) Ali, 'Hassan Kassim-Lakha, Count'.

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(⁹²) Marc van Grondelle. 2009. *The Ismailis in the Colonial Era: Modernity, Empire, and Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 88–9.

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(⁹⁷) Rogers Brubaker. 2005. 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1): 1-19, see p. 6.

(⁹⁸) Brubaker, '"Diaspora" Diaspora', p. 6.

(⁹⁹) Mattausch, 'From Subjects to Citizens', p. 130.

(¹⁰⁰) Sharmina Mawani. 2012. 'Songs of Praise: The *Git* Tradition of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims', in Sharmina Mawani and Anjoom Mukadam (eds), *Gujarati Communities across the Globe: Memory, Identity and Continuity*, pp. 59-78. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

(¹⁰¹) For a discussion of cultural capital refer to Pierre Bourdieu. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

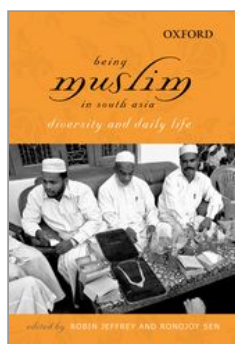
(¹⁰²) Those who moved to France did so to work in the Aga Khan network at Aiglemont outside Paris.

(¹⁰³) Bharati, 'Social Survey', p. 30.

(¹⁰⁴) Aga Khan. 1954. *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time*. London: Cassell and Company Limited.

(¹⁰⁵) Ruthven, 'Aga Khan Development Network', pp. 189-220.

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The Ismaili Conciliation and Arbitration Boards in India

A Model of Community Justice?

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter describes and analyzes the Ismaili Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (CABs) in India as a variety of community justice. The chapter describes the history, evolution, and structure of the CABs, both in conceptual as well as practical terms, and explains the international nature of the CABs and their structure of various national boards and an International Board. It analyzes the CABs as institutions that negotiate a variety of relationships. These include the relationships of state law and chthonic law; of tradition and modernity; of the community within itself as well the relationship between the community and the state, and the community and other communities; and, finally, the interaction of plurality and authority. The chapter argues that the CABs represent a response—which might be characterized as a solution—to the challenge of developing a form of community justice for a transnational community grounded in the faith traditions of Islam.

Keywords: Ismaili, conciliation, arbitration, diaspora, community justice, transnational community

If you fear a breach between them two (i.e. husband and wife) appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their conciliation: for Allah has full knowledge, and is acquainted with all things.

—Quran (4:39)

He who shall mediate between people for a good purpose shall be the gainer by it. But he who shall mediate with an evil mediation shall reap the fruit of it. And Allah keeps watch over everything.

—Quran (4:85)

This chapter seeks to describe the Shia Imami Ismaili Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (CABs) in India and to analyse them as a **(p.142)** variety of community justice. The first part of the chapter discusses the history, evolution, and structure of the CABs, both in conceptual as well as practical terms. It also explains the international nature of the CABs—linked as they are to various national boards and an international board.

The second part of the chapter analyses the CABs as institutions that negotiate a variety of relationships and forces. The chapter discusses how the CABs may be seen as negotiating (a) law—both formal and informal; (b) tradition—and the relationship of tradition and modernity; (c) community—the community inter se as well the relationship between the community and the state, and the community and other communities; and (d) the interaction of plurality and authority. Finally, the chapter considers the CAB system as a response to the challenge of developing legal norms for a transnational community that may also be seen as a step towards community justice.

Background to the Nizari Ismaili Community and CAB System

The Shia Imami Ismailis (hereinafter the 'Ismailis') are a diverse community within the Shia tradition of Islam whose members belong to different ethno-geographic and linguistic traditions, including those of Arabia, Iran, central Asia, western China, and South Asia. They live across Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa and in recent decades have established significant communities in Europe and North America, as well as emerging communities in other parts of the world such as south-east Asia. The Ismaili community globally numbers in the millions with populations in 25 countries, and may thus be seen as a transnational community. In common with other Shia Muslims, the Ismailis affirm that the Prophet Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib, his cousin and son-in-law, to lead the Muslim community after his death (632 CE). This spiritual leadership, known as *Imamat*, the Ismailis affirm continues thereafter by hereditary succession through Ali ibn Abi Talib and his wife Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. Succession to the *Imamat*, according to Shia doctrine and tradition, is by way of *nass* (designation), it being the absolute prerogative of the Imam of the time to appoint his successor from amongst any of his male descendants. Thus, all Ismailis have **(p.143)** a common allegiance to the living hereditary Imam of the time, His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, Aga Khan IV, whom they affirm is the 49th Imam in lineal descent from Ali, and a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.¹

The 48th Imam, Sultan Mohamed Shah, Aga Khan III was able to restructure Ismaili law and community governance by providing it with a contemporary articulation and modern form, that of constitutions. The first Ismaili Constitution was promulgated in 1905 and applied to the community in East Africa. By this date, in addition to the community in the subcontinent, there was a developing community of Ismailis hailing from the subcontinent in several parts of East Africa, a region which was growing to become a major base of the community. In fact, the Constitution of 1905, as with its immediate successors, was a series of documents applicable to the different settlements of the community. Each constitution was thus territorially defined, outlining certain specific institutional arrangements in each of the community's centres.

The 1905 Constitution was revised in 1925, 1937, 1946, and 1962.² There was also a later revision in 1977. It also seems there was a revision in 1954, at least for the community in Africa.³ In addition, further, albeit minor, amendments were made in 1964, although these did not occasion the promulgation of a revised constitution.⁴ Having **(p.144)** said this, the different constitutions must be understood as 'variations on a theme' since they all had broadly similar features with local adaptations. Shirin Walji explains:

In fact the majority of constitutional changes reflected not so much different values as renewed efforts at better organisation through the reworking of committee structure [*sic*]. Of course, since the constitution provided a common framework for the entire Ismaili population, any changes in it were bound to create changes in the society itself, if only in emphasising aspects more or less heretofore ignored. Nevertheless, constitutional revision was, practically speaking, more than anything else an attempt to coordinate local interests as the Ismaili society [*sic*] became more complex.⁵

The early constitutions thus gave form to the institutional structure for the community and created hierarchies within these institutions. The documents usually began with a prefatory section introducing the text. Some of these included statements outlining the status of the Prophet Muhammad and the Ismaili Imams. The constitutions then sometimes had interpretative and definition sections, and later, sections which outlined the structure of the community institutions, including institutional composition and procedures. Most importantly for present purposes, there were also rules for 'cases', that is, procedural rules for the settlement of disputes among community members by the institutions of the community. These eventually developed into the introduction of novel institutional structures for what we might call, in today's parlance, community-based alternative dispute resolution: the tribunals.

Being diasporic, the Ismaili communities had already learned to live in accordance with the laws of their place of residence and this was formally stated to be the community position in the constitutions. That is to say, the constitutions were designed to be for the community's *internal* organization and administration rather than in opposition or as an alternative to the 'laws of the land of abode' in which Ismailis lived. When personal law was articulated it was internally oriented inasmuch as it would stipulate rites for, for instance, a marriage to be performed in a community context. Finally, the constitutions affirmed **(p.145)** and articulated the role and authority of the Imam within the legal structure of the community. Thus, for example, the appointment of key institutional office holders was the prerogative of the Imam, and there were certain omnibus clauses within the constitutions regarding the authority of the Imam.

The development of law by constitutions for the Ismaili community represents a distinctive form of law for a Muslim community. Certainly, even for the Ismaili community, the constitutional form, when it was first employed, was novel. At the same time, the constitutional form was a useful way of establishing institutional frameworks for the community and accommodating, whether by amendments or the promulgation of revised constitutions, evolving institutional organs. Beyond its practical value, however, the constitution also represented the enhanced ability of the Ismaili *Imamat*, from the late nineteenth century until the present time, to structure community affairs in an explicit way and in a manner that previously was not always possible. Novel and different though the legal form may have been even in the context of the tradition, the constitutional form also rested on, and indeed developed language for, the articulation of ancient principles stemming from the Shia doctrine and belief and the Ismaili interpretation of Islam, principal among which is the authority of the Imam.

In 1986, an entirely new Ismaili Constitution was promulgated, which remains in force today. The significance of this document is that it provided one single constitution for all the Ismaili communities. Entitled simply 'The Constitution of the Shia Imami Muslims' and amended (but not reissued as a new document) by the execution of a constitutional instrument in 1998, this constitution, unlike its predecessors, is not territorially limited but rather applies to all Ismailis throughout the world.

The preamble to the 1986 Constitution begins by affirming the shahada and the concept of *tawhid* contained therein, and then speaks of the Quran as the final revealed message and the status of the Prophet Muhammad. In doing this, the preamble anchors the community's tradition in the context of basic tenets shared by all Muslims. The Preamble continues by saying: 'In accordance with Shia doctrine, tradition and interpretation of history, the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) designated and appointed his cousin and son-in-law Hazrat Mawlana Ali **(p.146)**

... to be the first Imam to continue the *Ta'wil* and *Ta'lim* of Allah's final message.'

Clearly, this section recites, as it claims, the cardinal principle of the Shia interpretation of Islam, thus confirming the Shia affiliation of the Ismailis. The preamble then invokes succession by way of *nass*, which is a principle of long provenance in the Ismaili tradition and in Shia thought more generally. In more specifically law-related terms, the preamble declares that the allegiance of Ismailis to the Imam is 'distinct from the allegiance of the individual to his land of abode' and that 'the Imams of the Ismaili Muslims have ruled over different territories and peoples in various areas of the world at different periods of history and, in accordance with the needs of the time, have given rules of conduct and constitutions.'⁶

Finally, the preamble also declares that 'the Imam enjoys full authority of governance over and in respect of all religious and Jamati matters of the Ismaili Muslims'. This is further confirmed by Article 1 of the Constitution, which states:

1.1 Mawlana Hazar Imam [namely, the Aga Khan] has inherent right and absolute and unfettered power and authority over and in respect of all religious and Jamati matters of the Ismailis.

1.2 Mawlana Hazar Imam has the sole authority to:

- (a) determine all questions that may arise as regards the meaning and interpretation of any religious or Jamati tradition or custom of the Ismailis and amend or discontinue it at any time;
- (b) confer a constitution on the Jamat and amend or discontinue any such constitution or any provision thereof;
- (c) determine all questions that may arise as regards the meaning and interpretation of any such constitution and grant dispensation therefrom;
- (d) constitute or discontinue any body or organisation under any such constitution and define or change its composition, functions, jurisdiction or powers;
- (e) constitute or discontinue offices under any such constitution, make appointments to any such office and terminate such appointments which shall all be held at Mawlana Hazar Imam's pleasure; and
- (p.147)** (f) prescribe the Rules and Regulations to be made under this Constitution.

As with the development of institutional forms, in several respects, the principles articulated in the preamble build upon the earlier constitutions.

Personal law is addressed in Article 15 of the Constitution. This article states:

15.1 In this Article the term 'Personal law' shall mean the rules governing the personal relationship of an individual to others in the society in which he lives, and shall include, but without limitation, rules in relation to birth, infancy, marriage (including prohibited degrees of consanguinity, affinity or fosterage, and marriage with non-Ismailis), mehr, nullity, restitution of conjugal rights, divorce (including iddat and maintenance), care and guardianship, legitimacy, succession and apostasy.

15.2 Subject as provided in Article 15.4, the personal law applicable to Ismailis shall be such personal law as has evolved within the Shia Imami Ismaili School of Thought of Islam.

15.3 Mawlana Hazar Imam [namely, the Aga Khan] has the sole right to interpret the personal law evolved within the Shia Imami Ismaili School of Thought of Islam.

One thing we can note is the distinction between the allegiance of Ismailis to their place of domicile and to their religious authority. This is stipulated in Article 15.4: 'To the extent that the territory of domicile or residence of any Ismaili does not recognize and apply or allow the application of the personal law of Ismailis, he shall be governed in that territory by such personal law as is applicable to him under the law of that territory.'⁷

This neatly contextualizes the reality of contemporary Ismaili law as being non-state (perhaps one might say 'transnational') law. On the one hand, this is a framework that should not impinge upon an Ismaili's obligations to the laws of her or his land of abode. On the other hand, there is a framework for a community operating internationally and resident in many different states. The 1986 Constitution also provides for localized 'Rules and Regulations' for each of the community's major centres.

(p.148) Of particular importance for the present discussion, is that the 1986 Constitution occasioned the establishment of a new community institution, namely the CABs, which function as community-based dispute resolution organs for the Ismailis. Even though the CABs per se came into existence formally with the promulgation of the 1986 Constitution, it is worth noting that the community-based dispute resolution structures and processes have existed in Ismaili communities since many decades. The CABs' predecessor institutions were called 'tribunals', as noted above, but even earlier there were the 'administrative councils' that had a dispute resolution mandate. While having broadly the same purview as their precursors, the CABs now operate within a broad network of local, regional, national, and an international board. The CABs exist in most countries of significant Ismaili settlement including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

According to Article 13.5 of the 1986 Constitution: 'Each National Conciliation and Arbitration Board shall upon the application of any Ismaili assist him to settle any differences or disputes with another party residing the areas of jurisdiction of the National Conciliation and Arbitration Board in relation to any of the matters mentioned in article 13.1(a).'

Article 13.1(a) provides that the CAB is 'to assist in the conciliation process between parties in differences or disputes arising from commercial, business and other civil liability matters, including those relating to matrimony, children of marriage, matrimonial property, and testate and intestate succession'.

The CAB system has recently been considered by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in its decision in *Jivraj v. Hashwani*, [2011] UKSC 40. In that case, the International Conciliation and Arbitration Board (ICAB) acted as an intervener and its chairman, Noordin Nanji, submitted a witness statement discussing the development, structure, and role of the CAB system, from which an extensive extract is appropriate. In his statement Mr Nanji says:

3.1 Ismailis have, throughout their history, maintained a tradition of resolving individual disputes and differences through an entirely voluntary process of mediation, conciliation and arbitration within the community.

(p.149) 3.2 ...The [CAB] system operates in 17 jurisdictions around the world. In some countries, *notably India and Kenya*,⁸ the decisions of such boards, particularly in matrimonial and personal law matters, though reviewable by the courts, are recognised by the law.

3.3 ...The Constitution also established an International Conciliation and Arbitration Board, ICAB.⁹

3.4 All disputes between parties in the same region are brought before the local board. Cases involving disputes between Ismailis residing in different national jurisdictions are dealt with either by the International Board or by the National Boards local to the parties in co-operation with each other.

3.5 The International Board deals with disputes that are international in scope. It also acts as an appeal board for appeals from arbitration decisions of any National Board worldwide. A decision on appeal by ICAB is final, conclusive and binding upon all the parties, provided that they have voluntarily submitted earlier to be so bound.

3.6 In addition to its casework, ICAB co-ordinates the global system, developing policies and programmes and identifying and sharing best practices across the CAB System.

3.7 The primary objective of the CAB System is to assist Ismailis to resolve disputes in an equitable, speedy, confidential, cost effective, amicable and constructive manner *and in an environment that is culturally sensitive*¹⁰.... Moreover, the Boards, whether arbitrating or mediating, are required to operate in accordance with applicable local laws. In arbitrating any dispute, a panel appointed by one of the Boards will apply the national laws applicable to the relevant dispute, *not any 'religious' law*.¹¹

3.8 In light of these objectives, the CAB system is guided by the following principles:

(a) Before mediating or arbitrating on any dispute, the Board must first be satisfied that the parties to the dispute have come to the Board voluntarily and of their own free will.

...

(e) The system is available at no cost and therefore is highly accessible, including to those of limited financial means.

(p.150) With respect to membership of the CABs, Mr Nanji's statement notes that all members are appointed by the Aga Khan for a three-year term, that all members serve on a voluntary basis and that 'membership typically is comprised of lawyers, social workers, accountants, businesspersons, other qualified professionals and senior community leaders'.¹²

Mr Nanji's statement further notes: 'The experience of the Boards is that more than 99 per cent of disputes referred to the Boards are dealt with by way of mediation or conciliation. It is only a handful of cases that are dealt with by way of arbitration.'¹³ As will be seen below, this is consistent with the experience of CABs in India. Finally, he asserts:

5.6 It is strongly felt within the community that one of the reasons for this high incidence of mediation and conciliation is the fact that the parties, and indeed the members of the community, have confidence that their rights will not be compromised and that a fair and equitable resolution of their disputes will be achieved through mediation and conciliation by the Boards. *Much of this faith and confidence rests on the fact that (a) the CAB system is constitutionally established by the hereditary Imam of the time, and thus embedded in the social fabric of the community and (b) the Board members and those they assist share an abiding religious commitment to the principles of brotherhood, fairness, justice and amicable resolution of disputes.*¹⁴

Cabs in India and under Indian Law

As noted above, CABs in India (and Kenya) have special recognition in the national legal systems. In India, the CABs operate under the general legislative framework of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996,¹⁵ which is broadly

enabling of arbitration and conciliation. In this respect, there is nothing particular about the CAB structure, since the statute permits arbitration and conciliation to take place in a variety of forms, whether ad hoc or more permanent, and with the parties given considerable latitude to determine their arbitrators and conciliators.

(p.151) More particularly, however, in Maharashtra, the Inspector General of Registration and Controller of Stamps (who appears also to hold the title of General Registrar of Marriage) issued a circular on 11 September 2009 modifying a condition in an earlier circular in effect saying that the requirement for divorce to be proven by court decrees does not apply to Muslims so that other, more 'traditional' forms of attestation of divorce that are part of Muslim legal history, for example, *faskh*, *talaq-nama*, and so on, may be used instead.¹⁶ This was passed on by the Deputy Inspector General of Registration in Mumbai to the city and suburban sub-registrars in Mumbai in a note dated 19 March 2011. Thus, divorces issued by the CABs in India, including terms of settlement, will be recognized by the courts of India without the need for a court-issued decree of divorce, but subject, of course, to the possibility of judicial review. In fact, though perhaps not atypically with Indian legal materials, when one looks at the actual circulars themselves it is rather difficult to figure out what their intended effect really is: one document refers to and amends an earlier document which in turn refers to and amends a still earlier document, and so on. I am, however, assured by S.H. Merchant, advocate, and chairman of the CAB in India until December 2012, that what I have described is the actual effect of the circulars.

This is particularly significant when considering the 'case load' of CAB system in India. At present, it deals with about 300 cases per year, between 80 and 85 per cent of which are matrimonial, with the remaining 15-20 per cent being commercial disputes. Thus far, however, the CAB system has operated on a conciliation basis in 100 per cent of its cases. It has never yet issued an arbitral award.¹⁷

CAB System and Its Negotiations

One of the salient contemporary issues facing Muslims in their different contexts is how to relate their traditions to the exigencies **(p.152)** and demands of modernity. For Ismaili communities in India and elsewhere, the CAB system forms one aspect of their encounter with modernity and one means by which the community's traditions engage with modern contexts. Specifically, the CAB system may be seen to negotiate a series of key relationships or tensions that confront the community as it seeks to relate its heritage to the conditions of modernity. The remainder of this chapter elaborates upon these negotiations and considers whether, as a result, the CAB system may be regarded as a form of community justice.

Negotiation 1: Formal and Informal Law

Arbitration and conciliation are often much vaunted for their capacity to provide, amongst other things, more participatory dispute resolution processes. They may also be seen to represent the working of ‘informal’ law—that is to say, for our purposes, the resolution of legal issues through norms which are not articulated in formal legal sources like legislation, codes, or case law, and through methods which are not governed by the formal provisions of civil or criminal procedure.

For the Ismaili community, the CAB system represents a way to provide the procedural flexibility and normative variety of ‘informal law’ within formal national legal systems. The capacity of CABs in India to issue divorces, including terms of settlement, allows it to bring into the determination of these matters community norms and values. Such norms are not expressed as legal rules, much less found in legal source materials, and yet they are influential in the settling of divorces. As Noordin Nanji mentioned, the CABs do not seek to apply ‘religious law’; a position consistent with Article 15.4 of the Ismaili Constitution noted above. Nonetheless, there are aspects of personal law—such as, for example, the provision of *mahr* (dower)—that the CABs will include in their determinations.¹⁸ Additionally, the CABs may be able to apply localized understanding of needs in determining amounts of settlement and the structures for settlement, whether these are set by conciliation and mediation, or arbitration. This flexibility enables the CABs to include community-based, informal norms as part of **(p.153)** its decision-making framework. Carrie Menkel-Meadow explained this capacity of alternative dispute resolution bodies, like CABs, as enabling them to go beyond what she called the ‘limited remedial imagination’¹⁹ of the adversarial system. In the case of the CAB system, what is important to note is that it is able to do this by ‘seasoning’ the justice²⁰ of the Indian legal system with informal norms.

Negotiation 2: Tradition and Modernity

Both the Ismaili Constitution and the CAB system explicitly invoke a basis in tradition. These various strands of tradition include Quranic verses on reconciliation and settlement (the verses opening this chapter being an example), which are the formants for the concepts of *sulh* and *takhim* in theology and law, the idea of the historical traditions of the community (see Mr Nanji’s witness statement above, paragraph 3.1), which have promoted reconciliation and amicable, negotiated settlement, and the traditions of the authority of the Imams as the capstone of the community structures and the authority that these structures enjoy. The CAB system might thus be seen as being consistent with what could be described as a Quranic ethos that has been interpreted and shaped through Ismaili history and grounded in long and deep traditions of the community.

At the same time, the CAB system is a thoroughly contemporary expression of these traditional sources and value. While its precursors—administrative councils and tribunals—may be seen to have had a fairly modern form, the CABs' operating principles closely align themselves with the terms used by arbitral entities like the International Chamber of Commerce and the London Court of International Arbitration, which are among the leading bodies for arbitration procedure in the world today.

Of course, the existence of a tradition is very difficult to prove. The CAB makes a claim to be located within a broader Muslim as well as **(p.154)** Ismaili tradition reaching back centuries. While the extent to which there can be seen to be such a tradition and the extent to which CAB participates in it are matters that may be disputed, it is nonetheless significant that CAB seeks to ground itself in a tradition, albeit using a form that would be familiar to the contemporary lawyer and practitioner of alternative dispute resolution.²¹

Negotiation 3: Community Inter Se; Community and State; Ismaili Community and Other Communities

The CAB system is able to negotiate between members of the community inter se in two respects. On one hand, CAB is able to resolve national or local disputes within the community in the context of local values and local conditions. That is to say, that the CABs in India are able to make terms of settlement (in the case of a matrimonial dispute, for example) suited to the conditions of life in India and drawing upon local knowledge. Additionally, however, because of the existence of the ICAB and the possibility of appeal, the CAB system also creates a sort of 'international jurisprudence' that establishes norms across the community worldwide. The ICAB, as one would expect, has representation from across the major areas of Ismaili settlement and thus includes the perspectives coming from these various cultural contexts. Less than 10 per cent of cases from India go to ICAB—some of these may be by way of appeal, and others due to the international nature of the parties or issues involved. Even at the international level, however, not all cases that are heard are resolved through arbitration. As always, conciliation is the preferred modality. Nonetheless, just like a lower court, the local or national CAB will always be aware of the appeal to the ICAB as a looming prospect and thus will want to ensure **(p.155)** that both procedurally as well as in terms of substance its determinations do not seem (too) incongruent with international norms, though specific details and amounts may depend on local conditions. Considering these two facets, it is possible to argue that the CAB system negotiates within the community by being permissive of local variety and adjustment while at the same time subjecting these, in a general and broadly principled manner, to an international, community-wide framework.

In addition to inter se negotiations, the CAB system negotiates a relationship between the Ismaili community and the Indian state. Simply put, the CAB system gives the community an institutionalized form of dispute resolution and a 'judicial body' which can interact with the state, and particularly with the courts.²² Moreover, the recognition provided by Indian law enables the community to have its institutional work recognized within the formal legal system, at least in terms of divorce decrees. Of course, this is not unique for the Ismailis as it applies to other Muslim communities as well, and this leads to the third aspect of community negotiation that the CAB system may provide.

The CAB structure enables the community to locate its legal heritage in institutions of its own creation. This gives the Ismailis an Ismaili forum, operating in an 'Ismaili way' under the authority of the Ismaili Imam, through which to seek dispute resolution. Without such a structure, the Ismailis who want to avail themselves of community-based dispute resolution would in all likelihood have to rely upon other either general Muslim or Jafari Shia organizations, which Ismailies lacking Ismaili-specific institutional structures have done in the past.

The type of negotiation discussed here also fits into a larger dynamic in India about the place of 'communal law', and Muslim law particularly, within the national legal system. Part of this issue is the debate about the very existence in India of plural personal (p.156) laws, which have a long-established but not uncontroversial history.²³ At this level, the existence of the CABs qua institutions of a particular community's world view would run counter to the long-running efforts to find a uniform, secular, personal law for all of India. On the other hand, the processes of the codification of Muslim personal law which reached its legislative high point in the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 had the effect, as Sen noted, of 'homogenizing Islamic personal law by wiping out the personal laws of "minorities within Indian Islam"'.²⁴ The CAB structure revives part of this plurality by providing an Ismaili voice of Muslim personal law. Thus, the CABs play into the unsettled political and legal debate in India between, to put it rather crudely, the legal scope of religious plurality and multiculturalism on the one hand versus uniformity and equality—especially gender equality—on the other.

In this milieu, what perspectives might the CAB approach offer both for Muslims in India as well as for the Indian legal system more broadly?

Secularism in India is of course contested both in principle and form. That said, the widely touted Indian form of 'secularism', so-called 'Nehruvian secularism', has been associated with an approach that is distinct from the French or Turkish models of *laïcité* that seek to cleanse religion from the public sphere and assertively advance a secular state. Instead of this, the Nehruvian model is usually characterized as being permissive of religious expression in the public

sphere and in seeking only to maintain the state's neutrality or equidistance from any one religious outlook. In the context of this framework, the CAB system might be said to demonstrate a way in which religious norms may be involved (even incorporated?) into the legal system in a manner that is non-threatening because they continue to be reviewable under the aegis of 'neutral' laws of the state. This may also allow the legal system to provide scope for religious (legal) freedom albeit within limits, and to this extent, represent a way in which the multiculturalists' hope that the 'deepest human commitments and **(p.157)** sentiments of people'²⁵ will indeed figure in the law. Of course, such a situation might be severely opposed by ardent secularists, in India as elsewhere, who, for good reasons, may see such a system like this as politically undesirable or legally intolerable. However, that does not seem to be—ongoing debate notwithstanding—the position taken in India thus far, both *de facto* and *de jure*.

At the same time, the CAB system might offer Muslim communities a model for how their legal norms can have a place within the Indian legal system, with legal norms calibrated to the context of the communities, but without excessively upsetting the 'secular' framework. As noted above, arbitration in the CABs proceeds on the basis of general and non-religiously oriented norms. Other forms of dispute resolution such as mediation and conciliation, which the CABs also employ, occur even less formally. But through all of these processes, the CABs in India will be motivated by the same impulse and informed and inspired by the same community sensitivities and community norms. In this sense, the CAB structure might carve out a space for Muslim legal norms and especially Muslim personal laws (the plural here being critical) to have a place in the Indian legal system without the need for state or national legislation to further codify the personal or other laws of India's Muslims. This has the advantage of not antagonizing those who might oppose separate legal jurisdictions being provided for Muslims in statute whether this opposition stems from the outlook of liberal secularism or inter-community fairness or gender equality or any other basis. Moreover, to recall Sen's observation cited above, the incorporation of Muslim legal norms through the more informal means of conciliation and arbitration represented by the CAB system would also better promote and preserve the diversity of outlooks and interpretations of India's Muslims.

It must be acknowledged, however, that a CAB-like framework is no panacea. In fact, some might say that the analyses and arguments given above simply gloss over the hard issues. It is true that if we take the view that there must be a definitive answer to the question of a **(p.158)** uniform civil law or no, the triumph of 'universal' liberal values or cultural plurality or to one or another notion of what gender equality demands, a CAB framework will not seem helpful but in fact potentially hurtful because it has the possibility to introduce more diversity and more complexity into the legal system of India. It is not the purpose of this chapter to present the CAB system as *the answer*. Rather, it is suggested that since we are, have been, and may always be on shifting ground in

which our political discourse has not settled the fundamental questions above then the context-sensitive middle ground of the CAB framework, which allows community norms to gain expression in the context of overarching national norms may be productive, and indeed appropriate, for India.

Negotiation 4: Plurality and Authority

Closely related to Negotiation 3 is the negotiation of plurality and authority. As the extracts from the preamble to the Ismaili Constitution make clear, the community has a clear and unitary authority formula: all and ultimate authority rests directly with the Imam. In the case of the CAB, this authority is expressed most clearly in the fact that all members within the CAB system, whether at the local, regional, national, or international level, hold office due to their direct and individual appointment by the Imam. In this respect, they are manifesting this singular and worldwide authority and, as Noordin Nanji's statement emphasized, it is their appointments by the singular authority which affords them credibility within the community. However, by establishing CABs in different areas and investing local and national boards with certain independent jurisdiction (albeit reviewable from local to national and national to international levels), the community and the *Imamat* is, at least implicitly, allowing for variation and plurality. In addition, since there is no 'code of law' or singular text of fiqh that the CAB is obliged to apply, the CABs' justice may be quite localized. Of course, one might view this not as a principled embrace of an ethic of pluralism but rather a pragmatic realpolitik concession to the fact that there is no Ismaili state and that any attempt to assert a law at either a local, national, or international level would be difficult for the Ismaili community. Whether expressive of a supremely pragmatic outlook or a principled position, however, the fact that the CAB structure allows **(p.159)** for variation creates a sort of limited 'legal federalism' within the global Ismaili community, and perhaps even within different sub-national communities,²⁶ while still maintaining a singular authority structure.

Cabs as Community Justice?

One of the distinguishing features of arbitration that sets it apart from proceedings in national courts is the breadth of discretion left to the parties and the arbitrator to structure the process for resolution of the dispute.... The stipulation that an arbitrator be part of a particular religion or belief can be relevant to this aspect of arbitration. As the ICC puts it in its written argument:

The *raison d'être* of arbitration is that it provides for final and binding dispute resolution by a tribunal with a procedure that is acceptable to all parties, in circumstances where other fora (in particular national courts) are deemed inappropriate (eg because neither party will submit to the courts or their counterpart; or because the available courts are considered

insufficiently expert for the particular dispute, or insufficiently sensitive to the parties' position, culture, or perspectives).²⁷

The use of 'religious tribunals' as instruments of the justice system is highly controversial and much debated. Some believe that religiously inspired norms are unfair and therefore a poor basis for justice. Of particular concern is often the position of women in such fora. Susan Okin, for example, maintains that many cultural minorities are patriarchal so that women may be better off without traditional norms being part of the calculus of justice.²⁸ On this logic, the CABs would not be instruments of justice because they may well employ normative frameworks which are inimical to women or other groups.

(p.160) An alternative view suggests that justice must be located within the broader context of multicultural communities. On this communitarian perspective, denying the possibility of using community norms limits the pursuit of justice.²⁹ The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, in the passage cited above, did not seem troubled by having strong community-linked elements play a part in arbitration (and presumably this would apply to conciliation as well), including provisions that would require arbitrators to be drawn from a particular religious community. Indeed, as we can see, the Supreme Court uses the submissions of the International Chamber of Commerce to endorse arbitration as having the virtue of providing sensitivity to the culture of the parties facing a dispute. On this basis, a key component of the calculus of justice would be its cultural contextualization.

Between the two positions, there is an intermediate option. Ayelet Shachar calls for 'transformative accommodation' that encourages the state on the one hand and cultural groups on the other to be responsive to the needs of their citizens and constituents.³⁰ The CAB system, which seeks to provide cultural context situated in the state, without direct recourse to 'religious law', may be seen to sit in this zone of transformative accommodation. In this respect, the CAB structure may be viewed as providing a type of community justice sensitive both to the demands of context (community) on the one hand, and also to independent and widely shared principles of legal propriety (justice) on the other. This indeed may be the most challenging negotiation that the CAB structure faces but, if it is successful, also its greatest promise.

Notes:

(¹) See generally http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=104448 from the website of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, www.iis.ac.uk (accessed on 2 February 2012).

(²) Shirin R. Walji. 1974. 'A History of the Ismaili Community in Tanzania'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

⁽³⁾ See J.N.D. Anderson. 1964. 'The Isma'ili Khojas of East Africa: A New Constitution and Personal Law for the Community', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1(1): 21-39.

⁽⁴⁾ See His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Federal Council for Africa. 1954. *The Constitution, Rules and Regulations of His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imam Ismailia Councils of Africa*. Mombasa: His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Federal Council for Africa; and His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Supreme Council for Europe, Canada and the USA. 1977. *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismailis in Europe, Canada and the United States of America*. Nairobi: His Highness the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Supreme Council for Europe, Canada and the USA.

⁽⁵⁾ Walji, 'History', p. 77.

⁽⁶⁾ For this and the preceding quote, see *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims*, 1998.

⁽⁷⁾ *The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims*, 1998.

⁽⁸⁾ Emphasis added.

⁽⁹⁾ See Article 12 of the *Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims*, 1998.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Emphasis added.

⁽¹¹⁾ Emphasis added.

⁽¹²⁾ Para 4.1.

⁽¹³⁾ Para 5.5.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Emphasis added.

⁽¹⁵⁾ No. 26 of 1996.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Circular No. D-13/Marriage Registration/Circ. Clarification/360/09, dated 11 September 2009, making amendments to Circular No. D-14/MRCC No 2425/1906/2004.

⁽¹⁷⁾ This information comes from a personal conversation I had with S.H. Merchant on 12 September 2011. Since the CABs work privately, figures detailing their work are not made public.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Consistent with widespread Muslim practice, all Ismaili marriage contracts must stipulate a *mahr* (usually enforced as a 'deferred dower').

⁽¹⁹⁾ See Carrie Menkel-Meadow. 2003. *Dispute Processing and Conflict Resolution*. Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, p. 364.

⁽²⁰⁾ The metaphor comes from 'when mercy seasons justice' in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, act 4, scene 1.

⁽²¹⁾ Interestingly, when preparing her report on community-based arbitration for the Government of Ontario, Marion Boyd cited the full Rules for Arbitration (in Appendix V) and Rules for Conciliation Proceedings (in Appendix IV) of the CAB in Canada as samples of what could be done. See Marion Boyd. 2004. *Dispute Resolution in Family Law: Protecting Choice, Promoting Inclusion*. Available online at <http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/about/pubs/boyd/fullreport.pdf> (accessed on 2 February 2012).

⁽²²⁾ Part of the reason that the CAB system in India can do this is because it concentrates some of the community's legal capacity. As of late 2012, the CAB system had 57 members on the national as well as regional boards, with seven or eight lawyers. Thus, the CAB collects legal expertise of the size of a small law firm for community purposes.

⁽²³⁾ Ronojoy Sen. 2010. *Articles of Faith: Religion, Secularism, and the Indian Supreme Court*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 131 onwards.

⁽²⁴⁾ Sen, *Articles of Faith*, p. 133.

⁽²⁵⁾ A phrase I take from Akeel Bilgrami. 2007. 'Secularism and the Very Concept of Law', in Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (eds), *The Crisis of Secularism in India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, pp. 316–32, see p. 320.

⁽²⁶⁾ In India, there are six regional CABs, plus the National Board. India also has a 'representative' on the ICAB, though, to be clear, ICAB members are appointed on their own merit and not directly to represent their countries. National CAB chairs attend full ICAB meetings as well however, and they do have a national representation role.

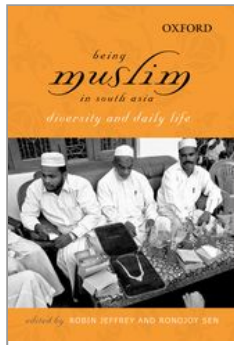
⁽²⁷⁾ *Jivraj v. Hashwani*, [2011] UKSC 40, para 61 (per Clarke LJ).

⁽²⁸⁾ Susan Okin. 1999. *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Edited by Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha C. Nussbaum. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁽²⁹⁾ See Gad Barzilai. 2003. *Communities and Law: Politics and Cultures of Legal Identities*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

(³⁰) Ayelet Shachar. 2001. *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women's Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.126ff.

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'Ilm and the Individual

Religious Education and Religious Ideas in Pakistan

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Abstract and Keywords

Scholars with an interest in the formation of religious ideas in Pakistan—including, especially, ideas about the management of sectarian and doctrinal difference—often stress the role of educational institutions. This largely conceptual chapter uses an account of various educational institutions (both state and non-state) to move away from an 'institutional' emphasis in favour of an appreciation for the ideational autonomy of Muslim 'individuals'. I argue that doctrinal expression should be seen as partly demand-driven, drawing attention to the ways in which individuals cobble together their own ideas from cross-cutting educational influences. I draw on a truncated history of educational options in South Asia as well as numerous interviews conducted in Pakistan. My argument challenges prevailing approaches to the formation of religious-cum-political ideas, moving away from an emphasis on the discursive parameters of Islam or the determinative influence of formal institutions toward a deeper appreciation for the relative autonomy of individual Muslim agents.

Keywords: Pakistan, education, religious education, schools, acquisition of beliefs, religious ideas

This chapter begins with a simple observation, namely, that Muslims disagree with one another about certain features of Islam. (I focus, for illustrative purposes, on differences regarding basic issues like *salat* or prayer). I seek to understand the ways in which different educational institutions prompt individual Muslims to deal with these differences in different ways. Some teach Muslims to ignore them; some teach Muslims to acknowledge them; some

embrace them; and so on. I ask: how have educational institutions in Pakistan shaped the treatment of difference? Where does the ideational influence of educational institutions 'end' and the autonomy of interpretive individuals 'begin'? How much influence do institutions actually have when it comes to the thoughts (regarding 'difference') of individual Muslims?

(p.162) Broadly speaking, this chapter focuses on the formation of *ideas* and, within this, the formation of religious-cum-political *subjectivities*, drawing special attention to three very different approaches to the treatment of sectarian and doctrinal difference: one associated with the work of the postcolonial **state** in which the terms of difference have been, for the most part, *ignored* (Idea₁ or I₁); one associated with the work of sectarian **madrastas** in which the terms of difference are, somewhat reluctantly, *acknowledged* (Idea₂ or I₂); and, finally, one associated with a rather unusual group of **individuals** amongst whom the terms of difference are, occasionally, *embraced* (Idea₃ or I₃). My question is: where do these three different approaches to the issue of sectarian and doctrinal difference actually come from? And, ultimately, what are their political effects (within the prevailing distribution of ideas)?

Theory

We are familiar with the notion that specific institutions are devoted to the production of specific religious ideas. Indeed, following Talal Asad, we are familiar with the notion that particular expressions of Islam are 'produced' by particular expressions of power.¹ It is, in fact, quite common to read that different types of schools in Pakistan (public schools, private schools, madrastas, and so on) engage the terms of Islam in ways that produce alternative (and competing) sets of ideas.

Within the existing literature the most common argument has three parts. The most common argument—in every sense an 'institutionalist' argument—suggests that (a) madrastas, catering to the rural poor, produce 'sectarian' students who are particularly intolerant of difference, (b) public-sector schools, catering to the lower middle classes, produce a slightly higher level of tolerance, and, finally, (c) Pakistan's elite English-medium academies produce the most tolerant **(p.163)** students of all. This argument, combining Talal Asad's attention to specific forms of 'power' (vis-à-vis the formation of ideas) with a more explicit form of 'class' analysis, can be found in the work of scholars like Tariq Rahman at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. This work derives its understanding of 'ideas' about difference (in this case 'tolerance') from a class-based analysis of institutions involved in the production of norms. In short: your class determines your school; your school defines your norms.²

In recent years, however, this rather simple class-based approach has been challenged by those with an interest in the expansion of educational markets and, within this, the expansion of 'school choice'. In particular, some have begun

to stress the extent to which local parents (including middle- and upper-class parents) actually *choose* a madrasa-based education for their children: some send their children to a madrasa full time; some send them early in the morning before shifting them over to a government school later in the day; some call the mullah from their local madrasa to provide their children with a religious education at home; some enrol their children in a madrasa until they can afford another type of school (for example a private school); and so on.³ Indeed, full-time madrasa enrolments are seen as being quite rare. ‘Hybrid enrolments’ are, by now, quite common.

Of course those with an interest in the power of educational ‘markets’ are still very much invested in a form of institutional analysis. But, over time, the drivers of one’s ‘institutional’ location (and, thus, one’s ‘ideas’) have spilled over from class into choice.

Even within this growing interest in ‘the marketplace of ideas’, however, the World Bank has pushed to dismiss (or downplay) the institutional role of madrasas, arguing that, today, very *few* parents actually choose a madrasa-based religious education for their children.⁴

(p.164) Unfortunately, the data underpinning this World Bank view—still tied to an appreciation for the ideational influence of particular institutions—is deeply flawed. In its own widely cited empirical research, for instance, the World Bank opted to document only full-time madrasa enrolments—indeed, full-time *residential* madrasa enrolments—noting that ‘fewer than 2%’ of all Pakistani children actually *live* in a residential madrasa. (Hence their rather surprising conclusion, namely, that the ideas articulated in local madrasas—I₂—were statistically unimportant.)

Needless to say this conclusion was profoundly misleading. It was misleading because, as I will explain, the fraction of those enrolled in local madrasas on a part-time (non-residential) basis is actually more than 70 per cent. Indeed, if ‘institutions’ play a role in shaping local ‘ideas’ (including ideas about difference)—and they do—it is essential to know something about which institutions students encounter. The World Bank completely failed to illuminate this issue.

It is surprising, given their obsessions with the ideational impact of particular institutions, that, even now, scholars continue to suffer from a pervasive lack of data regarding existing educational enrolment patterns in Pakistan, including, above all, ‘part-time’ enrolment patterns involving several different types of institutions mixed together: ‘[There are] no data ... on the part-time utilization of religious schools,’ notes Chris Fair, based in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown, drawing attention to the importance of this gap for those with an interest in charting the distribution of ideas. ‘Research on this [part-time

enrolment] issue is urgently needed,’ she notes, holding fast to the institutionalist orientation of so many scholarly colleagues, because ‘encouraging parents to opt out of the madrasa system ... could help [to] discourage the production of “intolerant worldviews”’.⁵

Of course, even apart from her disagreement with the class-based arguments developed by scholars like Tariq Rahman, choice-based scholars like Christine Fair continue to echo the work of Talal Asad, particularly when it comes to their appreciation for the role of power and, especially, the power of institutions, vis-à-vis the competitive ‘production’ of Islam (up to and including competing ideas about the treatment of doctrinal difference). There is, in fact, a persistent **(p. 165)** tendency to believe that ‘what you think’ (about the treatment of difference) is related to ‘where you study’. And, yet, having said this, there is also a tendency to ignore the possibility of any distinction between (a) the ideas articulated within institutions and (b) the ideas of the individuals who study in them.

This rather narrow focus on the productive power of alternative institutions is problematic. Indeed, what happens to the productive power of institutions when, owing to the prevalence of hybrid enrolments, the ideational ‘products’ of different institutions overlap?

The challenge does not lie in drawing attention to the ideational ‘gap’ between (a) schools (I₁: ignore difference) and (b) madrasas (I₂: acknowledge difference). The challenge lies in realizing that, at the level of existing enrolments, most children encounter at least two very different sets of religious-cum-political ideas *simultaneously*. In the context of their local madrasa, they learn to ‘recognize’ the terms of doctrinal difference. And, in the context of their local school, they learn to ‘ignore’ those terms altogether.⁶

Naturally, all of this hybridity at the level of (part-time) enrolments makes it extremely difficult to link the production of particular sets of ideas to discrete forms of institutional power. In fact a deeper understanding of existing enrolments has a remarkable tendency to push us beyond a one-dimensional *institutional* explanation for alternative expressions of ‘tolerance’ (I₁, I₂, I₃) in favour of an appreciation for the interpretive agency of educated Muslim *individuals*.⁷ ‘Who thinks what’ (about the treatment of sectarian and doctrinal difference) is no longer a question that can be answered with reference to class- or market-based analyses focused on the work of isolated *institutions*. **(p.166)** Moving forward, such analyses must be combined with a greater appreciation for the interpretive faculties of what might be described, departing from the work of Louis Althusser, as ‘multiply interpellated’ *individuals*.⁸

To develop this appreciation, I argue that scholars should begin to move away from some of the work of Talal Asad in favour of some of the work that Asad

himself rejected, including, above all, the foundational work on ‘ideology’ and ‘religion’ undertaken by Asad’s *bête noire* Clifford Geertz.

I begin with the interpretive underpinnings of Geertz’s early work on ideas (including his work on culture, ideology, and religion). And then, agreeing with Talal Asad’s initial critique of Geertz, including Geertz’s reliance on a rather ahistorical account of symbolic structures, I move forward with an effort to bring historical contingency back in to the programme that Geertz initiated.⁹ I do not turn to the Foucaultian (genealogical) work of Talal Asad: ‘ideas’ are a ‘product’ of (contested) ‘power’. Instead, I turn to the more thoroughly *historical* sensibility of those with an interest in the formation of ideas on the ground—scholars like Quentin Skinner, focusing on the underlying flexibility of ideational *conventions*, and, more specifically, Mark Bevir, reinforcing this ‘flexibility’ focus in his work on situated ideational *intentions*.¹⁰

According to Asad, ‘productive’ forms of ideational contestation unfold within ‘traditions’. (This emphasis on ‘contestation’ allows him **(p.167)** to stress the ‘productive’ capacity of said ‘traditions’.) Like Skinner, however, Asad is keen to stress the ways in which competing sets of ideas—the stuff of ideational production—are never entirely free-floating. They are, following Wittgenstein and Saussure (indeed, following Geertz himself), closely bound up with the ‘grammar’ of specific ‘semiotic’ or ‘cultural’ *traditions*. Indeed both Asad and Skinner could be said to *follow* Geertz in stressing that the contestation of ideas must be read *within* the parameters of a particular ‘culture’,¹¹ ‘convention’,¹² or ‘tradition’.¹³

(Asad is keen to stress the ‘productive’ capacity of ideational competition within each tradition. But, when it comes to the *reach* of that capacity, he often goes on to contain it with reference to the oddly stable parameters of ‘tradition’ itself. ‘New’ ideas, in other words, may emerge. But, for Asad, this process is always led by *elites*—that is, following Skinner’s mentor, J.G.A. Pocock, by a narrow understanding of power.¹⁴)

Theoretically speaking, Asad is open to the creative capacity of individuals. But in practice, he tends to stress the domination of powerful institutions instead. In fact, on many occasions, it is almost as if Asad believes that, ‘within’ the discursive tradition of Islam, too much emphasis on the creative capacity of Muslim *individuals* might betray a politically unacceptable capitulation to the ‘alien’ ideology of *liberalism*.¹⁵

Fortunately, the models of meaning formation articulated by Mark Bevir are much less politically fraught—much less twisted by the politics afflicting post-9/11 approaches to the study of ideas within ‘Islam’. This is particularly true owing to Bevir’s appreciation for the creative ideational capacity of individuals, and, more importantly, his interest in *the creative capacity of*

individuals ‘interpellated’ by multiple institutions simultaneously. Indeed, for Bevir, ideas are not a product **(p.168)** of ‘power’ pure and simple. Instead, ideas emerge from a situation in which multiple institutions produce what Bevir describes as cross-cutting ‘webs’ of belief. For Bevir, ideas may reflect the influence of particular institutions. (Individuals may articulate, without too much reflection, the stuff of I_1 or I_2 .) But—and this is where Bevir departs from both Asad and Bourdieu—*this is not always the case.*

For Bevir, ideas (properly understood) are *not* a ‘product’ developed and imposed by ‘the most powerful institution in town’. For Bevir, building on Geertz and Skinner, ideas are a product of individual efforts to activate particular features of their ideational ‘repertoire’ in light of their own *intentions*. Ideas, if you will, emerge at the level of individuals (both elite and non-elite) in response to the ideational dilemmas that surface when personal experience bumps into the indeterminate influence of multiple or cross-cutting institutions. Given Circumstance C, Bevir notes, people simply proceed to ask: which ideas work for me: I_1 , I_2 , ... or I_3 ?

Of course Bevir’s approach to the formation of ideas does not amount to a crude expression of liberalism. Instead it combines an analytical appreciation for the possibility of discursive *agency* with an empirically sensitive approach to the contingent formation of grass-roots (Islamic) *ideas*. Meaning is not reduced to a narrow account of elites and their competitive efforts to delineate (and impose) specific notions of heresy: school versus madrasa; Madrasa A versus Madrasa B; and so on. Instead it emerges from the confluence of discursive conventions, *overlapping* institutions, and the work of situated *intentions*.

I do not ignore the power of institutions. Working *with* Asad, I simply aim to measure the relative power of different institutions: ‘who studies where’ (school versus madrasa, madrasa versus mullah), ‘which ideologies tied to which institutions dominate the ideas of which individuals’, and so on? But even then, having said this, I also turn away from institutions, going on to stress the relative ideational autonomy of individuals. Indeed, moving *away* from Asad, I seek to measure ‘the extent to which’ individuals actually manage to challenge the institutionalized ideologies that surround them—moving away from I_1 or I_2 , towards the renegade articulation of I_3 .

This is the institutional-cum-ideational threshold that, I argue, demands more attention from those with an appreciation for the **(p.169)** prevalence of overlapping or hybrid enrolments (and their ideational impact) in the context of Pakistan today.¹⁶

Data

In what follows, I move beyond an account of I_1 ¹⁷ and I_2 ¹⁸ to introduce—albeit in a preliminary fashion—the existence of I_3 , drawing special attention to its expression in a small group of interviews captured on film during my research.

Before I turn to these interviews, however, let me challenge two features of the conventional wisdom regarding the ideas expressed in local schools (I₁) and madrasas (I₂).

First, with reference to the ideas conveyed in both public and non-elite private schools using government-sanctioned curricula (I₁), it is important to note that, contrary to the views held by a growing number of scholars, the homogenizing (‘see-no-difference’) rhetoric of the state did *not* emerge, for the first time, under General Zia ul-Haq during the 1980s. Instead, these patterns took shape much earlier. In fact the state’s aggressively ‘assimilationist’ approach took shape in the context of a concerted postcolonial effort to rally the Islamic nation of Pakistan against emerging forms of Bengali and Balochi ‘provincialism’ during the late 1940s and 1950s.¹⁹

The irony, of course, lies in the fact that initially it was the *Bengali* chairman of Pakistan’s first ‘Education Conference’, Fazlur Rahman, working with the *elected* governments of the late 1940s, who sought to homogenize the terms of Islam in an effort to resist the threat of **(p.170)** provincialism, whereas, during the 1960s, it was *another* Fazlur Rahman, the philosophically inclined *Punjabi* Fazlur Rahman, who pressed for the ‘pluralization’ of religious interpretation under the centralizing *dictatorship* of Field Marshal Ayub Khan.

Furthermore, turning to the competitive ‘recognition’ of difference in the context of Pakistan’s ‘intolerant’ madrasas (I₂), it is important to challenge those who seek to trace the terms of tolerance along explicitly *sectarian* lines. There is, of course, no such thing as an intrinsically tolerant Muslim sect. On the contrary, Sunnis compete with Shias, and, in due course, various groups of Sunnis compete (often violently) with one another—typically, with reference to alternative interpretations of contemporary Sufi practice: Barelvi versus Deobandi, Deobandi versus Ahle Hadith, and so on. In fact, empirically speaking, the only defensible position seems to lie in stressing the fact that each *firqa* or *maslak* (sect or sub-sect) is devoted to an understanding of ‘orthodoxy’ defined in relation to ‘others’.²⁰

The problem, of course, lies in the fact that, precisely insofar as alternative orthodoxies persist (as, for mere mortals, they must), the ‘mixed enrolment’ patterns I mentioned earlier begin to reflect a set of sharply cross-cutting trends. On the one hand, for instance, recalling the views articulated in local *schools* (I₁), most Pakistanis insist that ‘for the sake of the nation’ there should be only one Islam—only one approach to the terms of Islamic orthodoxy. And, yet, at the same time, recalling the simultaneous influence of their local *madrasa* (I₂), most Pakistanis have a tendency to believe that, insofar as there should be ‘only one’ Islam, that ‘one’ should reflect their own *sectarian* point of view. Indeed, as one of our respondents said, summing up the basic thrust of this key point with reference to his own point of view: ‘Jab sab bilkool **ek jaisay** hain, tho

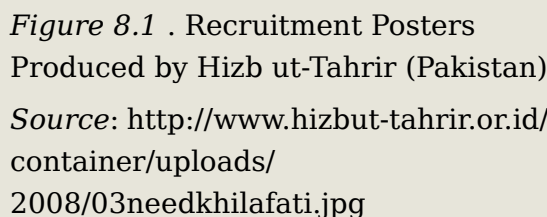
Of course, some actively seek to advance their 'own' understanding of Islam with violence. These are, broadly speaking, the (Kharijite) jihadis who have received so much attention in the literature.²¹ But, for the most part, my project is focused on the other end of the spectrum, drawing attention to those 'multiply interpellated' Muslims who believe that, practically speaking, *there is never only 'one' Islam*. These are the Muslims for whom the sin of 'pride' (that is the notion that as a human being, one might actually 'know' the Truth) is still the greatest sin of all (I₃).

Produced by Hizb ut-Tahrir (Pakistan)

Source: <http://www.hizbut-tahrir.or.id/container/uploads/2008/03needkhilafati.jpg>

Where does this group come from, if, contra Talal Asad, their diversity-friendly ideas (I₃) *cannot* be tied to the influence of any one **(p.172)** hegemonic ‘institution’? Where do their ideas come from if, for all intents and purposes, their ideas are not formally embedded in any formal institution at all?

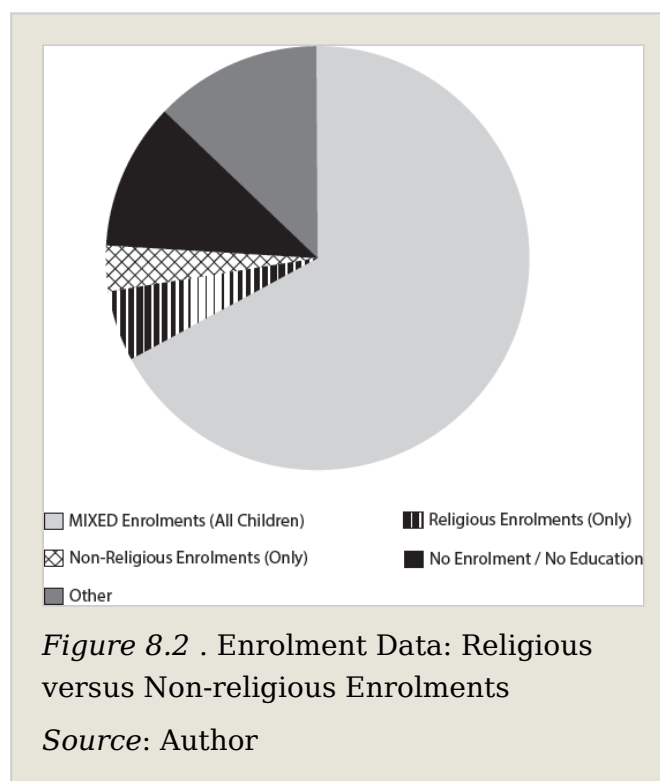
Over time, following Skinner on ‘conventions’ and Bevir on ‘intentions’, my attempt to trace the scope of these diversity-friendly ideas (I₃) has taken shape in the course of two very different data-collection strategies—one largely quantitative and one broadly qualitative. In the first instance, focusing on the distribution of specific ideologies (regarding ‘difference’) *within* the discursive space of Islam, I worked with the Gallup organization in Islamabad to identify a sample of 500 respondents across 50 different urban, peri-urban, and rural locations in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Azad Kashmir, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. My interviews allowed me to illuminate ‘who studies where’ in ways that begin to estimate the level of ‘mixed’ institutional enrolments in Pakistan. In the second instance, however, turning to the expression of *ideas*, I sought to determine ‘who thinks what’ about the terms of sectarian and



doctrinal difference. Who ‘ignores’ the terms of difference (I_1)? Who ‘acknowledges’ them (I_2)? Who ‘embraces’ them (I_3)? And so on.

The challenge lay in tying ‘diverse approaches to difference’ to variations in prior educational experience. Which enrolments ‘produced’ which ideas? And, if most enrolments were, in fact, *hybrid* enrolments, which institutions had the greatest impact within an ideational context defined by ‘overlapping interpellations’?²² **(p.173)**

Turning first to the question of enrolments (‘who studies where’), it is important to point out that, among those who were able to provide their children with some type of formal education (roughly 90 per cent of my sample), a clear majority favoured some combination of schools *and* madrasas (see Figure 8.2). In fact, working with three **(p.174)** outstanding research assistants from Lahore, I discovered that this preference for ‘mixed’ enrolments was practically ubiquitous—rich, poor; urban, rural; Sunni, Shia; and so on. (Although, having said this, I must acknowledge that, among the illiterate rural poor, the statistical *minority* who sought to privilege full-time enrolments within a single madrasa was slightly larger.)



Within this context of enrolment hybridity, however, turning more specifically to the *school*-based portion of existing enrolments, we followed most of the available literature in observing that 71 per cent attended public schools and 29 per cent attended non-elite private schools—although, as noted above, it is important to stress that *these two options differ very little at the level of curricular content*. Both, relying on government-sanctioned textbooks to prepare their students for government-sanctioned exams, embrace the terms of I_1 .²³

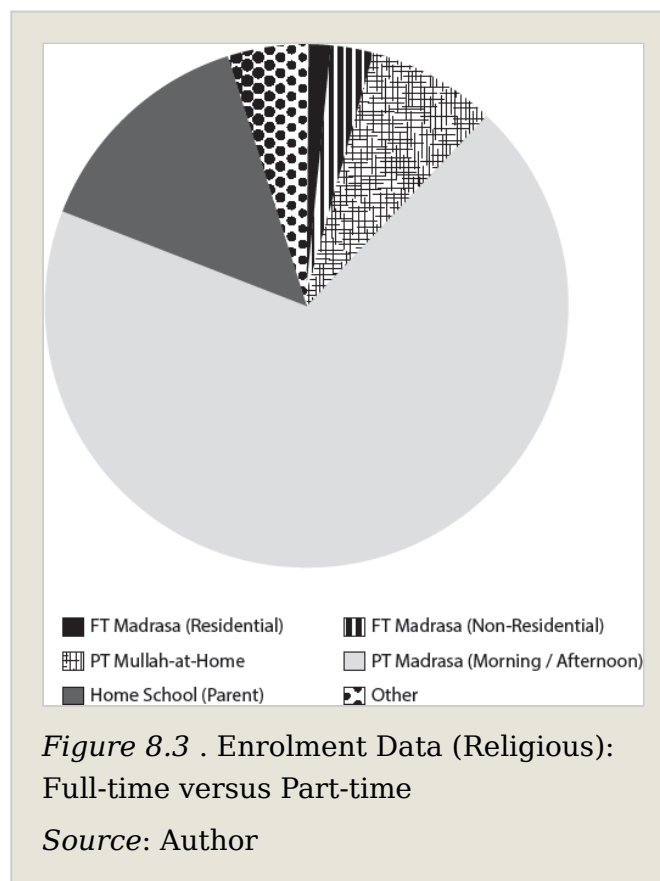
With respect to the portion of our enrolment data regarding local *madrasas*, however, our data were actually quite revealing. In keeping with the World Bank study mentioned earlier, we found that ‘fewer than 2%’ of all madrasa enrolments were, in fact, *full-time residential* enrolments. (Although, having said this, non-residential enrolments brought this ‘full-time’ figure to 4.1 per cent.)

On a *part-time* basis, however, the total number of madrasa-based enrolments increased dramatically. In fact, even apart from the 8 per cent who invited the mullah from their local madrasa to teach their children at home, fully 69 per cent travelled *to* their local madrasa during the morning or afternoon. See Figure 8.3.

Clearly, most children receive their mullah-based religious education (I_2) on a ‘part-time’ basis. Indeed, with these data in hand, there is simply no doubt that, at the level of ideas, most children are ‘multiply interpellated’ (suggesting a clear challenge to basic ‘institutionalist’ arguments regarding the production of particular ideas).

In order to study the ideational impact of this multiple interpellation, however, we went on to document the extent to which those we interviewed felt that the sectarian and doctrinal differences within Islam should be ‘ignored’ (I_1), ‘acknowledged’ (I_2), or ‘embraced’ (I_3). Should the existence of, say, Bareilvi and Deobandi ideas regarding Sufi practice (involving or not involving attachments to local shrines) be ‘mentioned’ in the context of local schools? Should the simple fact **(p.175)**

that Sunnis and Shias employ different prayer styles be ‘explained’ by the mullahs ensconced in local madrasas? Initially, in the context of each interview, we asked our respondents whether the existence of different sects should be mentioned in the context of local schools: 63 per cent, clearly reflecting the homogenizing approach to sectarian and doctrinal difference associated with ‘nationalist’ schools (I_1), said ‘No’. We then explained that, in a purely practical sense, ‘everyone is aware that Sunnis and Shias have different styles of prayer’. And, with this in mind, we asked people whether these differences should be ‘mentioned’ or ‘ignored’. This time, 65 per cent said: ‘These differences should be ignored’ (although, in this



case, it may be worth noting that, **(p.176)** contrary to the conventional wisdom, this 'denial of difference' was found to increase with income).²⁴

Turning to those who said that different groups and alternative prayer styles *should* be mentioned, however, we sought to elucidate the basic meaning of this patchy (and relatively less common) response: I₂. In particular, we asked people whether sectarian and doctrinal differences should be mentioned in an effort to 'distinguish right from wrong' (in a sectarian sense) or, alternatively, in a bid to promote what might be described as 'a positive regard for others'.

At this point, drawing attention to forms of doctrinal disputation (known as *munazara*) in the context of local madrasas, 74 per cent (that is, 19 per cent of our total sample) said that doctrinal differences should be mentioned primarily in an effort to 'distinguish sectarian Truths'. In fact only 26 per cent (6.8 per cent of our total sample) felt that differences should be mentioned in an effort to facilitate a positive regard for others—indeed, 'a positive regard for difference' *within* the terms of Islam (I₃). See Figure 8.4.

It is worth pointing out that this figure has remained remarkably consistent over time, falling to a low of 6.8 per cent in 2010 from a high of 8 per cent in 2006. In fact it would be extremely difficult to say that this reluctance to 'embrace' the terms of difference was 'produced' by a particular set of events.²⁵ I should also add that, in keeping with conventional expectations, this 'positive regard for difference' was correlated with higher levels of education. But, even among those with a university-level education, the overall size of this group seemed to challenge conventional expectations. Indeed, the prevalence of this view among Pakistan's most highly educated citizens never exceeded 15 per cent. See Figure 8.5.

Of course, the main point does not lie in drawing attention to the infrequency of this view. The main point lies in drawing attention to the fact that this view was *not* derived from the government-sponsored curricula conveyed in public and non-elite private schools **(p.177)**

(p.178) (I₁). Nor was it derived from the work of ordinary madrasas (I₂). On the contrary, this 6.8 per cent was an outlier (I₃)—a very *important* outlier for those with an interest in the interpretive ‘autonomy’ of Pakistan’s ‘multiply interpellated’ Muslims.

I am currently working to develop a deeper understanding of this rather unusual set of views (I₃). For the time being, let me simply note that the challenge lies in developing a deeper appreciation for the ways in which, following some of the work undertaken by Daniel Levine in Latin America, ordinary individuals ‘take images ... from dominant [religious] institutions’ and then, simply, ‘rework’ them ‘with an eye to [their] ... immediate needs’.²⁶ What exactly are the immediate ‘needs’ that lead some of Pakistan’s ‘multiply interpellated’ Muslims to embrace the terms of I₃? Indeed, if the demographic personality of this group is somewhat random—and it is (encompassing urban, rural, male, female, rich, poor, literate, illiterate, Sunni, Shia, Salafi, Bareilvi, Punjabi, and Balochi Muslims)—what are the circumstances or, following Bevir, the experience-based ideational ‘dilemmas’, that draw the ideas of this group together?

By and large the people we interviewed were very clear about ‘what they learned in school’ (I₁) and ‘what their local mullah taught them’ (in a specific sectarian sense) (I₂). But, as they began to reflect on their own experiences, *some* (6.8 per cent) engaged in what might be described as ‘autonomous interpretive acts’. What emerges from the language of those who sought to

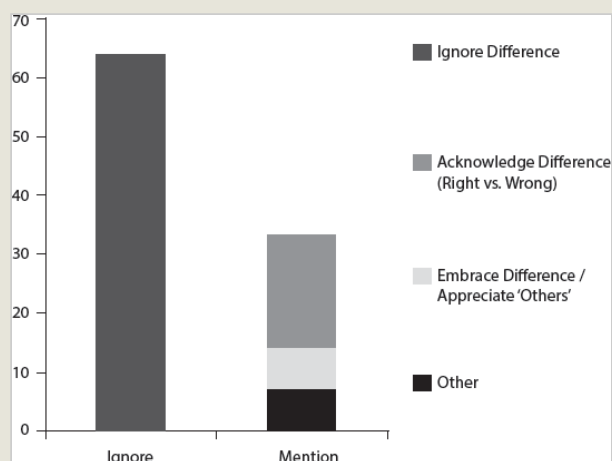


Figure 8.4 . Dealing with Difference: Ignore, Acknowledge, Embrace

Source: Author

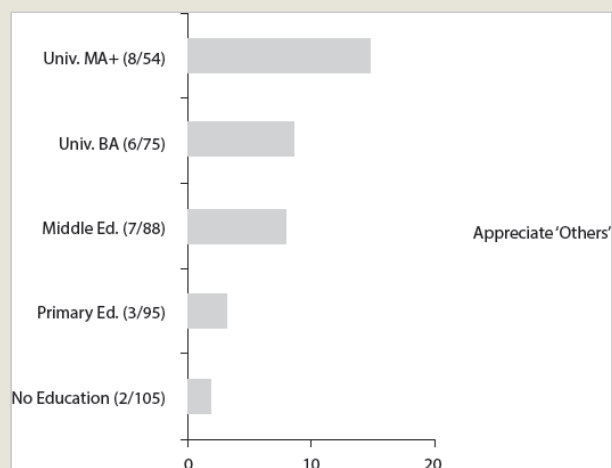


Figure 8.5 . Dealing with Difference: Embrace/Appreciate ‘Others’

Source: Author

embrace the terms of difference (I₃) is not a language of 'liberalism' (for example, individual religious liberty or an attachment to the prioritization of one's own private conscience). What emerges is, for all intents and purposes, a language of religious *movement*, indeed, a language of religious 'progress'. *Difference* as a gateway to *discussion*; discussion as the precursor of 'progress'.

'There should be different opinions,' noted a lower-middle-class man in his late 50s living near Sibi (Balochistan). He explained:

(p.179) If there are no different opinions, life will become ... very difficult. And ... see ... well ... the second thing is that our religion will remain ... in one place. Difference is the reason that religion goes ahead. If there are no differences, our religion will stay in one place. It shouldn't be like that. This is [basically akin to] being an enemy of religion.

Or, drawing attention to a similar set of views articulated by an affluent teenager in Karachi (Sindh):

The religion has to remain viable; [it has] to keep on going. Each culture has its own interpretation, and for this reason there are differences. This is just part of the tradition. [Religion] is like [the inside of] a mould. It [takes shape] according to local culture. I'll give you an example. People say to me, 'When will you come [around] wearing salwar kameez,' and I say, 'Why?' They say, '[because] this is an Islamic dress.' Now, you tell me. Salwar kameez is the dress according to *our* culture and tradition [here in Pakistan]. It has no connection to 'Islamic' dress. There is no interpretation about this [dress] in [the context of] religion [at all].

Islam is constantly diversifying, constantly changing, these very different respondents seemed to say. And this dynamic diversity was, at least for them, defined as religiously 'good'.

Broadly speaking scholars with an interest in the production of religious ideas, including ideas about difference (and, thus, toleration) have overplayed the importance of elite-driven institutions. I aim to bring individuals back in, without, at the same time, pushing for a sense of unlimited discursive autonomy. Moving away from Asad in favour of Bevir, I note that ordinary Muslims inhabit something like a Poulantzian world of ideas—subordinated to, but also self-consciously manoeuvring within, the interstices of elite institutional power: 'Institutions reach out to popular groups,' argues Daniel Levine, only to find that, as contingent dilemmas emerge, ordinary individuals *within* those groups step forward to 'rework' religion for themselves.²⁷

Responding to their experience, ordinary Muslims simply 'become' Muslim in a variety of self-conscious ways. They draw upon the ideological diversity of their own educational landscape and, then, having done so, they go on to refashion

that landscape according to their **(p.180)** own circumstances. 'The whole process,' notes Daniel Levine, 'spills over' and exceeds 'formal ... institutional limits.'²⁸ What we need, he explains, anticipating some of the ideas articulated by Mark Bevir, is not an account of institutional power pure and simple. What we need is an effort to understand the 'transformation of religious ideas' with particular reference to the 'religious bricolage' unfolding at the level of individuals.²⁹

Notes:

(¹) See Talal Asad. 1983. 'Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz', *Man*, 18(2): 237-59, quoted on p. 252; Talal Asad. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Talal Asad. 2001. 'Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's 'The Meaning and End of Religion'', *History of Religions*, 40 (3): 205-22.

(²) Tariq Rahman. 2004. *Denizens of Alien Worlds: A Study of Education, Inequality, and Polarization in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

(³) See, for example, C. Christine Fair. 2008. *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan*. Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace.

(⁴) See Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Tristan Zajonc. 2005. 'Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data'. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 3521, March 2005, p. 4.

(⁵) Fair, *Madrassah Challenge*, p. 11.

(⁶) See, for example, an Urdu language textbook for Class 10. As Pakistanis, the book explains, 'we have faith in one God, one Prophet, and one [holy] book ... so it's binding on us that we should be one as a nation also. We are all Pakistanis now: not Balochis ... not Sindhis ... not Pathans' (I₁). Or, as one of my research assistants pointed out after reviewing hundreds of similar textbooks, 'sectarian differences are never mentioned', despite being one of the most important issues facing Pakistan today (I₁).

(⁷) Matthew J. Nelson. 2008. 'Religious Education in Non-Religious Schools: A Comparative Study of Pakistan and Bangladesh', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 46(3): 271-95.

(⁸) See Louis Althusser. 1971. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 127-88. Althusser does not stress the autonomous agency of multiply interpellated individuals.

⁽⁹⁾ See Clifford Geertz. 1964. 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in David Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*, New York: Free Press, pp. 47–76; Clifford Geertz. 1966. 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London: Routledge, pp. 1–46.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Peter L. Janssen. 1985. 'Political Thought as Traditionary Action: The Critical Response to Skinner and Pocock', *History and Theory*, 24(2): 115–46; Mark Bevir. 2000. 'The Role of Contexts in Understanding and Explanation', *Human Studies*, 23(4): 395–411.

⁽¹¹⁾ Geertz, 'Ideology'.

⁽¹²⁾ Quentin Skinner. 1969. 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8(1): 3–53.

⁽¹³⁾ Asad, 'Anthropological Conceptions'.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See Janssen, 'Political Thought', for an account of both Skinner and Pocock.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See, for example, Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, pp. 269–306.

⁽¹⁶⁾ See also Joshua T. White. 2012. 'Beyond Moderation: Dynamics of Political Islam in Pakistan', *Contemporary South Asia*, 20(2): 179–94.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Matthew J. Nelson. 2009. 'Dealing with Difference: Religious Education and the Challenge of Democracy in Pakistan', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43(3): 591–618; see also Nelson, 'Religious Education'.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Mohammad Qasim Zaman. 2007. *The Ulama in Contemporary Pakistan: Custodians of Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Others have identified similar trends even earlier. See, for example, Francis Robinson. 1974. *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1923*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Farzana Shaikh. 1989. *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁽²⁰⁾ See Talal Asad. 1986. 'Medieval Heresy: An Anthropological View', *Social History*, 11(3): 345–62. See also Muhammad Qasim Zaman. 1998. 'Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalisation of Shi'i and Sunni Identities', *Modern Asian Studies*, 32(3): 689–716; S.V.R. Nasr. 2000. 'The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics', *Modern Asian Studies*, 34(1): 139–80; Nelson, 'Dealing with Difference'.

(²¹) For an early example of this reading, see Fatima Mernissi. 1995. 'Fear of the Imam', in *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Addison-Wesley, pp. 22–41.

(²²) In this context it is imperative to remember the work of scholars like Pierre Bourdieu. As noted above, institutions really do matter; individuals really do 'embody' the ideas 'inculcated' by the institutions they encounter. We must simply avoid overstating Bourdieu's argument regarding the influence of unequal institutional power (although, having said this, we must also be careful to avoid exaggerating the autonomy of those concerned). Following Bevir, the individuals involved in the process of meaning making are not opting for the 'freedom' of a Friedrich Nietzsche or the conceptual 'chaos' of a Jacques Derrida. They are simply working to articulate their opposition to a variety of institutionalized options within what might be described, following Judith Butler, as a self-conscious 'poetics of interpretive possibility'. Their ideas are merely the ideas of those who intervene to construct a 'bricolage' of religious-cum-political arguments from amongst the ideologies they have to hand—the frameworks, concepts, and logics of the multidimensional landscape they inhabit within the contested space of Islam. See Dale F. Eickelman. 1992. 'Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies', *American Ethnologist*, 19(4): 643–55, see p. 653. 'Because they are trained in both traditional and modern schools,' Eickelman notes, referring to various mullahs in Iran, they 'are able to "bridge" religious styles, utilizing aspects of both forms of religious expression as [specific] circumstances warrant'. See also Gregory Starrett. 1995. 'The Hexis of Interpretation: Islam and the Body in the Egyptian Popular School', *American Ethnologist*, 22(4): 953–69, see p. 954.

(²³) The margin of error is 3–6 per cent. See also Nelson, 'Religious Education'.

(²⁴) Within the minority Shia community, the fraction that sought to 'ignore' group differences dropped (slightly) to 51 per cent. Apparently, Pakistan's government-sanctioned curriculum, committed as it is to a thoroughgoing denial of difference, is not entirely ineffective, even amongst sectarian minorities.

(²⁵) See Nelson, 'Religious Education'; Nelson, 'Dealing with Difference'.

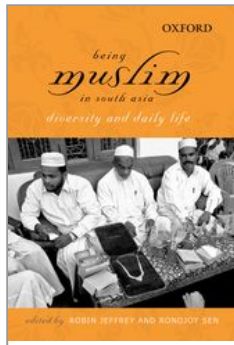
(²⁶) Daniel H. Levine. 1986. 'Religion and Politics in Comparative and Historical Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, 19(1): 95–122, see pp. 97, 99.

(²⁷) Levine, 'Religion and Politics', pp. 95, 96, 99.

(²⁸) Levine, 'Religion and Politics', pp. 119, 121.

(²⁹) Levine, 'Religion and Politics', p. 120.

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Darul Uloom Deoband's Approach to Social Issues

Image, Reality, and Perception

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Abstract and Keywords

Much of the recent debate concerning Muslims and Islamic religious education has been confined to security issues. Simplistic reductionism and predetermined assumptions that regard Islam as a fixed religion and Islamic institutions as hotbeds of terrorism disregard the specific and complex local and political histories that have shaped and continued to influence various transformations in the fundamental ideology of many Islamic religious institutions. Through a study of Darul Uloom (House of Knowledge) Deoband, an influential religious seminary in Uttar Pradesh, India, considered next in standing only to Cairo's Al-Azhar, this chapter analyses various transformations in the approach and concern of a supposedly 'orthodox' religious institution. Can an orthodox institution simultaneously play moderate and progressive roles? Does Deoband have a progressive vision for the Muslim community? In this chapter, I have shown the ways a supposedly orthodox institution of Islamic learning has been trying to maintain its religious authority in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, schools, religious education, Darul Uloom, orthodoxy, transformation, Islamic institutions

Much of the recent debate concerning Muslims and Islamic religious education has been confined to security issues. Such debates often make the case that Islam is against change and that religious education imparted through *deeni* madrasa creates potential recruits to wage global 'jihad'. In this context, Tariq

Rahman remarks that 'the madrasas, which were earlier associated with conservatism, ossification and stagnation of Islam, are now seen as hotbeds of militancy'.¹ **(p.182)** Such simplistic reductionism and predetermined assumptions that regard Islam as a fixed religion and Islamic institutions as hotbeds of terrorism disregard the specific and complex local and political histories that have shaped and continued to influence various transformations in the fundamental ideology of many Islamic religious institutions.

Through a study of Darul Uloom (house of knowledge) Deoband, an influential religious seminary situated in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India and considered next in standing only to Cairo's Al-Azhar University, this chapter analyses various transformations in the approach and concern of a supposedly 'orthodox' religious institution. Despite the adherence to its fundamental ideology, which is still informed by orthodox values and conservatism, Darul Uloom Deoband has shown a willingness to engage with social issues. Such a transformation raises many questions. Can an orthodox institution simultaneously play moderate and progressive roles? Does Deoband have a progressive vision for the Muslim community? To what extent does Deoband represent Indian Muslims? Is Deoband diverging from its religious sphere by engaging with social issues?

Darul Uloom Deoband works in close association with Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH), a socio-religious organization working for the betterment of Indian Muslims.² Most of its functions and programmes on social and political issues are organized by JUH. This is to ensure that the prime objective of Darul Uloom Deoband of imparting religious education and serving the religious needs of the Muslim community does not get affected.

This chapter argues that although the primary purpose of Deoband is to serve the Muslim community in the religious sphere, it has shown an interest in engaging with social issues time and again. However, the justification for such intervention in the social sphere comes from the religious point of view.

(p.183) Darul Uloom Deoband has also been regarded as a representative (real or imaginary) of Indian Muslims. Such a perception of Deoband has far-reaching consequences as it not only ignores internal divisions within the Muslim community, but it presents Muslims as one homogenous community with a single command structure. Every move of Deoband has been presented and interpreted by the media as the voice of all Indian Muslims. Despite various progressive stands taken by Deoband on many social issues, it is still viewed as an orthodox institution informed by primordial values, which in turn has become the image of Indian Muslims. Through a study of Deoband's approaches on social issues, this chapter seeks to analyse the transformation of the supposedly orthodox institution of Islamic learning. The chapter is based on data collected during my two-week stay (of three intervals) in Deoband, where I met and interviewed Deoband's ulama and students. The chapter also uses newspaper reports for

Deoband's views on social issues as well as the Muslim issue. The chapter is divided into three parts. First, the chapter outlines the background of the study, situating it within the larger debates on madrasa education. Second, the chapter highlights the viewpoints of Deoband on various social issues it has confronted in recent times. Finally, the chapter analyses recent challenges faced by Deoband and how it has responded to them.

Background

Darul Uloom Deoband was established on 30 May 1866. Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi were the principal founders of the seminary.³ Since its establishment Deoband has been playing an important role in serving the religious and spiritual needs of the Muslim community. The system of education aimed to create prayer leaders, writers, preachers, and teachers who, in turn, could disseminate their knowledge. In its approach to education, Deoband not only aimed to achieve academic excellence but also build the moral character of the students. The religious orientation of Deoband **(p.184)** is in accordance with *Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaat* (People of the Sunnah and Jamaat), which signifies an approach towards life based on the practices and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. It also sought all guidance and interpretations in the matter of religion in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah.⁴ Deoband is an orthodox institution that strongly believes in theological puritanism. It is against shrine-based Sufi Islam and opposes Western ideas and values.

Darul Uloom Deoband remains the most influential madrasa in South Asia. There are an estimated 2,000 madrasas in India said to be following Deobandi ideology. Muhammad Zaman argues that 'of all the sectarian orientations in South Asia, that associated with Deoband has been intellectually the most vibrant and politically the most significant'.⁵ Moreover, Deobandi ideology is not only influential in the Indian subcontinent, but its graduates are present in south-east Asia, the United Kingdom, and Africa.⁶ According to one estimate, out of Britain's 1,400 mosques, about 600 are run by Deoband-affiliated clerics. At the same time, 17 of the United Kingdom's 26 Islamic seminaries follow Deobandi teachings, which produce about 80 per cent of all domestically trained Muslim clerics.⁷ Such claims might not be exaggerated, as Peter Mandaville in his study of Islamic education in Britain has pointed out that madrasas in the United Kingdom 'until very recently faithfully followed the traditions and practices of Deoband'.⁸

(p.185) After 11 September 2001, Deoband came under scrutiny because of its alleged role in influencing the Taliban. Such perceptions existed because of the training of important Taliban leaders such as Mullah Omar and Jalaluddin Haqqani in the supposedly Deoband-style madrasa of Darul Uloom Haqqania located at Akora Khattak in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province [NWFP]). This has also affected the image of Deoband in India. In a statement to the United Nations Security Council in December 2008,

Pakistan accused Darul Uloom in Deoband of influencing terrorists in NWFP and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and urged the seminary to issue a specific fatwa⁹ asking the terrorists to stop the killings. Similarly, in an earlier report in August 2008, India's Second Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Congress leader M. Veerappa Moily said that in January 1994 Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief, Mohammed Masood Azhar Alvi, had 'interacted extensively with the leading figures of the Deoband Ulema'.¹⁰ The linking of Deoband with the Taliban has been widely criticized and, so far, no evidence of a direct link between Deoband and the Taliban has been exposed.¹¹ India houses nearly 2,000 madrasas that follow the Deobandi syllabus. One might as well argue that if the Deobandi ideology in itself is responsible for creating fanatics and terrorists, India should have the largest number of home-grown terrorists waging armed struggle against the Indian state. There is so far no evidence that students coming out of these madrasas are involved in any kind of anti-national activities. This prompts us to pause and rethink where the roots of terrorism lie, which is however beyond the scope of the current chapter.

(p.186) Despite the hype and headlines, there is little empirical and serious work exploring the role of madrasas in civil society. Barbara D. Metcalf's seminal work on Deoband is the only book-length study that provides a historical analysis of the institution and its role in reviving Islamic consciousness in British India.¹² Doing a micro-level study of a Deobandi madrasa, Arshad Alam has analysed the nuances and intricacies of a madrasa system. He writes that for the madrasas, 'the "other" is not a Hindu, but a Muslim from another *maslak* (sect)'.¹³ Similarly, Barbara D. Metcalf argues that 'madrasas had not only become a centrally important site of cultural reproduction, but also one of denominational loyalties dividing Muslims'.¹⁴ This is an important analysis, as very often madrasas are dubbed 'monolithic' and 'homogenous' in their character.

Barring a few works, scholars have ignored the evolution of the Deobandi movement in independent India. However, there is a proliferation of interest in Deoband among journalists, particularly over the past two decades, and a number of pieces have appeared in newspapers and magazines. These writings, as argued by Zaman, 'show considerably less acquaintance with the culture of the madrasa' and rush to blame the institution for producing potential recruits to wage jihad.¹⁵ Such an understanding is based on an erroneous notion of madrasas that was imported from Afghanistan and Pakistan where madrasas were used for militant activities as a direct result of American and Pakistani government policies during and after the Afghan jihadi (1980-9) era.¹⁶ Such developments have not taken place in India and there is no reason to believe that they may take place in the future. **(p.187)** The radicalization of certain madrasas in Pakistan has little to do with any inner logic of the madrasa system. Rather, it must be seen as a result of complex developments in the larger political economy of the Pakistani state.¹⁷

By locating my study within the larger debates on the madrasa system, I intend to explore various forms of interactions and cultural exchanges between Deoband and non-Muslims in India. Are these interactions new or precipitated by certain structural requirements? It must be noted that during the colonial period, the Deobandi leadership under the banner of JUH opposed the two-nation theory of the Muslim League and instead aligned with the Indian National Congress to fight against the British.¹⁸ In independent India, the JUH has mostly played a moderate role by participating in ongoing political regimes. Before discussing Deoband's approach towards non-Muslims, it is pertinent to understand the structure of education in Deoband, as it sheds light on the ideological orientation of the seminary.

Structure of Education

The syllabus taught in Deoband was heavily influenced by *dars-i nizami*, which was developed in the famous school of Farangi Mahal in eighteenth-century Lucknow. Yet, there were differences in the purpose of education of these two schools. While the ulama of Farangi Mahal trained students to get government jobs, Deoband aimed at creating a body of religious leaders that could serve the spiritual and **(p.188)** legal needs of the Muslim community.¹⁹ Thus, the major emphasis of the Farangi Mahal syllabus was *maqulat* (rational sciences), in contrast to the Deobandi school, which emphasized *manuqulat* (revealed sciences).²⁰

Currently, there are 3,500 students studying in Deoband. There are no facilities for girls' education. But there are a few Deobandi madrasas across India imparting education to Muslim girls. Every year, 1,000 students are admitted based on their performance in an all-India entrance examination. The number of aspirants to study in Deoband in the late 1990s was around 3,000, which has gone up to 7,500 in 2010. Students can take this entrance examination after completing five years of primary education in a secular school, or in Deoband, or in any other madrasa. These numbers also reflect the continued importance of the seminary among Indian Muslims.

After gaining admission, students have to undergo eight years of education, during which they are taught *manuqulat* (the revealed studies of Hadith or tradition and Quran), *maqulat* (the rational studies of fiqh or jurisprudence), logic and philosophy, sharia (Islamic law), *tafseer* (the interpretation of holy scriptures), and Arabic. After completing eight years of education, students get a *sanad-e-faraghat* (graduate degree) or the certificate of Fazil, which is equivalent to a bachelor's degree. Many students discontinue their education after becoming Fazil. There are some students who choose to go for *takmilat* or post-graduate courses in the areas of fiqh, *tafseer*, or *adab* (literature) and other specialized courses.

The establishment of the Department of Computer Training and Internet in 1996 and the Department of English Language and Literature in 2002 is an important landmark in the history of Deoband. It marks the symbolic adoption of modern technology and values. Ironically, modernity has always been pitched against the orthodoxy, but Deoband's approach reflects the combination of modernity with orthodox values. However, only a few students join these departments, since people doubt the worth of these degrees from an institution meant for producing religious teachers and scholars. Those who **(p.189)** are really interested in English language and computer courses chose to go to secular institutions.²¹

However, the services of the departments of computer training and English are utilized to maintain the Deoband's website, which is in four languages: Arabic, English, Hindi, and Urdu. At the same time, the services of these two departments are used by great muftis of Deoband to issue online fatwas and respond to questions using the Internet. Because of this, Muslims living in any part of the world can get instant answers regarding religious and social matters. Deoband receives more than 50 email messages on a daily basis, which also shows its popularity. Until 2006, fatwas were issued only in Urdu even when they received the questions in English. But from 2006, it began issuing fatwas in English in order to cater to the growing number of non-Urdu speaking Muslims living in different parts of the world. In 2010, nearly 40 per cent of the fatwas were issued online.²²

Education is free for children who are admitted to Deoband. There are mainly two kinds of students who come to Deoband. Students in the first category come from pious families, where their parents want them to obtain a religious education and serve the community. The second category of students, which forms the majority, includes children from poor Muslim families. These poor Muslims do not have any option but to send their children to Deoband or a madrasa, as they cannot afford formal education in secular schools. In a study of madrasas across different countries, Jan-Peter Hartung also found that 'despite a formally guaranteed primary education for all by the respective governments in most of the countries ... enrolment in a *madrasa* is often considered the only affordable means for even basic education by large parts of the Muslim population'.²³ Students coming **(p.190)** to study in Deoband also receive pocket money of Rs 100 each month. Praising the honesty of the students, Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, deputy vice chancellor of Darul Uloom Deoband, told me that students coming from wealthy families usually decline to accept the money, which then goes to needy students.²⁴ He also pointed out that more students from middle-class backgrounds are now coming to study in the seminary. This shows the continued relevance of religious education even among the affluent section of the Indian Muslim community.

In terms of geographic dispersion, the majority of the students or nearly 75 per cent are from northern India, predominantly from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There are also sizable numbers of students from West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Odisha. The predominance of students from northern India can be attributed to the location of the seminary. However, this has dropped from nearly 85 per cent in the 1990s to 75 per cent in 2010, which demonstrates the growing popularity of Deobandi schools beyond northern India.

Deoband has attracted students from different parts of the world. It has students from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, South Africa, and other countries.²⁵ Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, spiritual leader of Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, also studied in Deoband. This also reflects the transnational linkage of Deoband and its global influence. However, the flow of foreign students has almost stopped since the 1990s when the Indian government tightened visa rules.²⁶ Despite this, the Deobandi school of thought is widely respected in the Islamic world.

Building Bridges with Non-Muslims

Darul Uloom Deoband, with the help of the JUH, has been attempting to build bridges between Hindus and Muslims. It has condemned communal violence and tried to mitigate the tensions between Hindus **(p.191)** and Muslims through various confidence-building measures between the two communities. One can also note that so far there has been no communal violence in the town of Deoband where the seminary is located. The progressive orientation of Deoband can be measured by its attempt over the years to create harmonious relationships with non-Muslims.

In February 2004, Deoband requested Muslims to respect the sentiments of Hindus by avoiding sacrificing cows on the eve of Eid ul-Zuha. Hindus consider the cow sacred. Thus, Mufti Habibur Rahman, head of the Darul's fatwa bench, stated, 'Though cow-slaughter is legitimate under Shariat, it is advised that sheep, goat and camel be sacrificed in states where there is a ban on cow-slaughter. The law of the land should not be violated and peace should be maintained in the states and the country.'²⁷ This was not a fatwa but an appeal to the Muslim community to show its goodwill and respect towards the sentiments of the Hindu community.

Deoband has also opposed the idea of India as *dar ul-harb* (abode of war).²⁸ In March 2009, it issued a fatwa declaring India *dar ul-aman* (abode of peace) where jihad is meaningless. While supporting the fatwa, Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, deputy vice chancellor of Deoband, commented that 'the condition of Muslims in India is better than in many Muslim countries including our neighbour Pakistan'.²⁹ Such pronouncements have great significance in the

context of the situation in Kashmir and the recent rise of home-grown militancy in India.³⁰

(p.192) Deoband has also endorsed the practice of yoga by Muslims and said that it is not un-Islamic. This is a remarkable step, considering that yoga has been banned in Indonesia by Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body, for eroding the Muslim faith. A similar edict was issued against yoga in Malaysia in 2008. Arguing in support of yoga, Maulana Khaliq Madrasi remarked, 'The broad purpose of yoga is to create health and it should not be associated with any religion.' However, he cautiously mentioned, 'If some words, which are supposed to be chanted while performing it, have religious connotations, then Muslims need not utter those. They can instead recite verses from the Quran or praise Allah or remain silent.'³¹

Deoband has also criticized the labelling of Hindus as kafirs or unbelievers, which has a derogatory connotation. JUH spokesman and member of the Deoband faculty Abdul Hamid Naumani stated that although the term kafir does not have any 'derogatory connotation', and it 'only means someone not belonging to Islam, if its use hurts anyone the term should be avoided'.³² However, there is no unanimity among Deoband's ulama on the issue and some of the ulama prefer to use the term kafir.³³

(p.193) In yet another attempt to build a harmonious relationship with the Hindus, Deoband criticized the ban on the Bhagavad Gita in Russia. The vice chancellor of the seminary, Maulana Abdul Qasim Nomani, not only condemned the 'Russian diktat against the Hindu holy scripture', but urged Hindus and Muslims to unite in order to apply pressure on the Russian government to lift the ban immediately.³⁴ In order to ensure that such a move would not be politicized by ultra-conservative elements of the Muslim community, the seminary requested Hindus to extend similar support to Muslim communities facing analogous problems in Europe and other nations such as the ban on wearing the hijab.

Deoband has repeatedly shown its progressive stance on various social issues. It has supported the Women's Reservation Bill, which stipulates a 33 per cent quota for women in parliament and other elected bodies.³⁵ While distancing himself from the political and technical intricacies of the Bill, Maulana Marghoob-ur-Rehman, former vice chancellor of Deoband said, 'While reservation is a controversial issue itself, we believe women are an oppressed section of the society and deserve appropriate representation at the highest level (of democracy) from every community and religion.'³⁶ Furthermore, in November 2009 Deoband urged the community to fight against global warming.³⁷

In yet another significant move, Darul Uloom Deoband also condemned violence carried out in the name of Islam. In February 2008, **(p.194)** it denounced terrorism for the first time, announcing that 'Darul Uloom Deoband condemns all kinds of violence and terrorism in the strongest possible terms'. The reasoning behind this is that 'Islam has given so much importance to human beings that it regards the killing of a single person [as that] of killing the entire humanity'.³⁸ On 31 May 2008, the seminary also issued a fatwa declaring 'terrorism as un-Islamic'.³⁹ Since then, Deoband and its sister organization, JUH, have regularly organized meetings and conferences to denounce, and try to build a movement against, terrorism.

Such steps against terrorism by Deoband are important in the wake of terrorist attacks by Muslim militants on American and European targets, and with Western commentators and the mass media questioning the claim by Muslim scholars and clergy that Islam does not support such attacks. The *New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman, asked 'Why is it that a million Muslims will pour into the streets to protest Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, but not one will take to the streets to protest the Muslim suicide bombers **(p.195)** who blow up other Muslims?' He said that Muslim leaders needed to tell the world what Islam is and show how its positive interpretations were being promoted in their schools and mosques.⁴⁰ By issuing the far-reaching fatwa and launching the campaign against terrorism, Deoband had not only disapproved of terrorism but also set an example of how Muslims and madrasas in other parts of the world can play a role in checking the radicalization of Muslim youth.

Indian Muslims, however, are divided over the need for a fatwa against terrorism. 'It [the fatwa] just shows that the community is suffering from inferiority complex. There is no need for such a fatwa, as all Muslims know that our religion is against terrorism. What is the need for reassurance? And who are we reassuring?' questions Mufti Mohammed Mukaram, Shahi Imam of Fatehpuri Masjid, Delhi.⁴¹ However, instead of viewing this as apologetic behaviour by Muslims, Maulana Shaukat Qasmi Bastavi, general secretary of Rabta Madarise Islamia, regards it as imperative in light of the defamation of Muslims and Islam across the world.⁴² Syed Shakil Ahmad, who is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court and a member of JUH, praises such an active role by Deoband by stating: 'They [Muslim organizations] will be failing in their duty, if they do not come out to denounce terrorism. The need has arisen to stand up when the whole community was being branded as terrorists. It is the job of the religious teacher and Ulama to tell what Islam is.'⁴³

One can certainly agree with Syed Shakil Ahmad's statement, given the nature of Indian society where religion has come to occupy an important place. Religious organizations and religious leaders can be used to promote social causes in a society that is deeply religious. When asked why it took such a long time after 11 September 2001 to declare a fatwa against terrorism, Maulana

Arshad Madani of JUH said that 'September 11 was a global event but it didn't affect India **(p.196)** directly. When terrorism reached Indian soil, we had to come out in public and issue fatwa against terrorism'. On the basis of anonymity, one observer told me that the fatwa was also a means to consolidate the position of the Mahmood Madani group in the JUH and Deoband against his uncle Arshad Madani's group. The conflict between these two groups is now well known, which is also affecting the smooth functioning of the institution. However, the endorsement of the stand of the Mahmood Madani group on the fatwa by his competitor Arshad Madani shows the wider acceptability of the campaign against terrorism.

The impact of the fatwa against terrorism and its denunciation in various public forums and meetings is visible. Religious leaders from Hindu communities have been actively participating in such meetings. Yoga guru Baba Ramdev participated in one such meeting at Deoband in November 2009, which was attended by a mostly Muslim crowd of 500,000.⁴⁴ This has sent positive signals across all communities in India.

Similarly, Muslim communities in Mumbai refused to bury the dead bodies of nine terrorists responsible for the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai that left 166 people dead. The decision was endorsed by Darul Uloom Deoband.⁴⁵ Such extreme steps also reflect the deep resentment of mainstream Indian Muslims against the growing menace of terrorism, which has often been orchestrated in the name of Muslims and Islam.

Challenges before Deoband

The conservative approach of Deoband on some issues might hamper the influence of Deoband beyond certain constituencies of supporters. In 2005, Deoband issued a fatwa asking Muslim women to observe purdah or wear a veil while participating in politics. Maulana Marghoob-ur-Rehman, former vice chancellor of Darul Uloom Deoband, said, 'Women can contest elections. But they must also **(p.197)** observe purdah.'⁴⁶ This was vehemently criticized by various groups, as fatwa can only be issued on religious matters. Asserting their right to issue fatwa on various issues, Maulana Rehman contended, 'If a Muslim woman contests an election, it becomes a matter of our society and religion.' Deoband subsequently realized that they were overstepping their boundaries by issuing fatwa on political matters. After the incident, an eight-member panel was constituted and assigned the task of examining and releasing religious and political fatwa.⁴⁷ This incident highlights the conservative ideology that still informs Deoband.

Similarly, the 30th general session of the JUH on 3 November 2009 endorsed a fatwa of 2006 by Deoband that calls on Muslims not to sing 'Vande Mataram', the national song of India, as it is in violation of Islam's faith in monotheism. This fatwa was criticized by various Muslim groups. Criticizing the resolution,

Minority Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said, 'It [the resolution] is unacceptable. It is counter-productive. It is not good for our society and our country. It is not good for Muslims.'⁴⁸ Many Muslim intellectuals also opposed Deoband for such a regressive stance.⁴⁹

A recent controversial fatwa against working Muslim women stated, 'It is unlawful for Muslim women to do job in government or private institutions where men and women work together and women have to talk with men frankly and without veil.' This fatwa was issued on 4 April 2010, but was covered by the media only after a month when NDTV broadcast it on 11 May 2010.⁵⁰ The fatwa was vehemently criticized by **(p.198)** all sections of Muslim communities. Outrage against the fatwa resulted in a statement by the seminary that the response was only in relation to a question and it is not a fatwa against 'Muslim working women'.⁵¹ One might question the coverage of the fatwa by the media after more than a month. It demonstrates continued media bias against Muslims, but at the same time it confirms the orthodox orientation of Deoband.

Deoband has also opposed the establishment of the Central Madrasa Board by the government to regulate and modernize madrasas in the country. The opposition to the proposal is largely due to the fear of undue interference by the government in the running of a madrasa.⁵² Criticizing the move of the government, Maulana Riyasat Ali Bijnori, who teaches in Darul Uloom Deoband, said, 'The purpose of a madrasa is to provide religious education. We are not concerned with other system of education. How fair would it be, if we ask the government to introduce religious education in secular institutions? The government needs to understand this.'⁵³ One cannot disagree with Maulana Bijnori. But the stand of Deoband has also been criticized by other Muslim organizations such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (Jadid) and All India Ulama Mashaikh Board.⁵⁴ Both are Sunni Muslim organizations, which argue that such a move by Deoband deprives the madrasas of government support.

Looking at such opposition within the Muslim community to Deoband's stance on many social and religious issues, one might ask if Deoband has been given disproportionate attention by the media. One way to measure the continued relevance of Deoband is to look **(p.199)** at the inflow of students over the years, which, as shown above, is continuously increasing.

Similarly, the number of people seeking fatwa from the seminary has gone up. There are currently five muftis working in the department of Darul Ifta, which is responsible for issuing fatwas on religious and social matters to Muslims. They receive about 40 letters and more than 50 email messages, while about 8-10 people from different parts of India visit to seek fatwas every day. Deoband issued nearly 9,000 fatwas in 2006, which went up to nearly 13,000 in 2010. While interpreting this continuously growing number of Muslims seeking

religious guidance in their daily lives, Mufti Zainul Islam argued that although modernization of society is believed to result in the decline of religiosity, we are witnessing a rise in religious piety in the Muslim community.⁵⁵ What is interesting to note is the growing number of young people now seeking fatwas. These young people use the Internet to send their questions, and the majority of them are living outside India. Modernization, instead of adversely affecting religiosity, is in fact helping a section of young Muslims to lead their lives in accordance with Islamic principles.

This chapter has shown the ways a supposedly orthodox institution of Islamic learning has been trying to maintain its religious authority in a rapidly changing world. Deoband is essentially a sectarian organization that caters to the needs of its followers who follow the Deoband school of thought. Yet the media has projected Deoband as representative of the entire Indian Muslim population, and this continues to inform the larger public perception. What is important to note is that despite being an orthodox institution of Islamic learning, Deoband continues to command a following not only among Indian Muslims, but also among a section of non-Muslims. Many progressive fatwas on various issues have earned Deoband respect among non-Muslims in India. There are, however, contradictions in their approach on some social issues. While Deoband has supported 33 per cent reservation for women in elected bodies, it has asked Muslim **(p.200)** women to wear burqa or a veil when entering politics and urged them to refrain from working, if possible. At the same time, it has issued a fatwa against India's national song. Such a conservative approach by Deoband might inhibit its influence beyond a certain minority section of society.

It is, however, apparent that Deoband has mostly adopted a progressive approach when dealing with non-Muslims, but is reluctant to apply a similar approach towards Muslim women. This has resulted in growing disillusionment among educated sections of Muslim women towards Deoband. They view the organization as being mired in a medieval mindset when dealing with modern issues. It must, however, be noted that when Deoband was established, it acted as an alternative to Western-inspired modernity. As argued by Metcalf, Deoband became a bastion of 'cultural reproduction' that helped the Muslim community preserve its identity while simultaneously participating in the project of nation building as Indian. While Deoband still commands great respect among Sunni Muslim communities in India and South Asia, it has also failed to adapt to the changing times.

Notes:

(¹) Tariq Rahman. 2008. 'Madrasas: The Potential for Violence in Pakistan?', in Jamal Malik (ed.), *Madrasas in South Asia: Teaching Terror?*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 61-84, see p. 61.

(²) JUH was established in 1919 to fight British imperialism through non-violent means. The aim of establishing JUH was to keep Darul Uloom Deoband away from getting any undue attention from the British government. After independence, JUH concentrated upon the religious, social, economic, as well as educational uplift of Indian Muslims. For details, see www.jamiatulama.org/about_us.html

(³) Darul Uloom Deoband is managed by the Majlis-e-Shoora or body of counsellors. The first body of counsellors included Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi, Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi, Haji Abid Hussain, Zulfequar Sahab, and Munshi Fazal Haq.

(⁴) Sunnah refers to the living habits and sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

(⁵) Muhammad Qasim Zaman. 2007. 'Tradition and Authority in Deobandi Madrasas of South Asia', in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 61–86, see p. 63.

(⁶) See Dietrich Reetz. 2007. 'The Deoband Universe: What makes a Transcultural and Transnational Educational Movement of Islam?', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27(1): 139–59.

(⁷) Andrew Buncombe. 2008. 'Muslim Seminary Issues Fatwa against Terrorism', *Independent*, 2 June.

(⁸) Peter Mandaville. 2007. 'Islamic Education in Britain: Approaches to Religious Knowledge in a Pluralistic Society', in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 224–41, see p. 238.

(⁹) Fatwa refers to a religious opinion concerning Islamic law, often issued by a mufti (religious scholar). It is a non-binding opinion, and a Muslim can follow or not, depending upon his/her relationship with the mufti and the status and respect of the mufti in the Islamic world. The word fatwa gained wide attention in 1989 after the famous execution fatwa of Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran, against the novelist Salman Rushdie in the wake of the publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988.

(¹⁰) Second Administrative Reforms Commission. 2008. *Combating Terrorism: Combating by Righteousness*. New Delhi: Government of India, p. 27.

(¹¹) Vishwa Mohan. 2009. 'Jamat Asks the Government to Clarify Report That JeM Chief Had Met Deoband Ulemas', *Times of India*, 6 January.

(¹²) Barbara D. Metcalf. 1982. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

(¹³) Arshad Alam. 2008. 'The Enemy Within: Madrasa and Muslim Identity in North India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 42(2-3): 605-27.

(¹⁴) Barbara D. Metcalf. 2007. 'Madrasas and Minorities in Secular India', in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 87-106, see p. 94.

(¹⁵) Zaman, 'Tradition and Authority', p. 61.

(¹⁶) See Rahman, 'Madrasas'; Taberez Ahmed Neyazi. 2002. 'Madrasa Education', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(38): 3967-8.

(¹⁷) For a detailed discussion on developments of militancy in some Pakistani madrasas, see Jessica Stern. 2000. 'Pakistan's Jihad Culture', *Foreign Affairs*, 79(6): 115-26; Yoginder Sikand. 2004. 'Militancy and Madrasahs: The Pakistani Case', *Muslim India*, 22(1): 10-13. For an account of diversity in Pakistani madrasas, see Rahman, 'Madrasas'.

(¹⁸) Farhat Tabassum. 2006. *Deoband Ulema's Movement for the Freedom of India*. New Delhi: Manak Publications. See also Yohanan Friedmann. 1971. 'The Attitude of the Jam'iyat-i 'Ulama'-i Hind to the Indian National Movement and the Establishment of Pakistan', in Gabriel Baer (ed.), *The Ulama in Modern History, Asian and African Studies*, vol. 7, Jerusalem: Israeli Oriental Society, pp. 157-83.

(¹⁹) Francis Robinson. 2001. *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*. London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, p. 23.

(²⁰) Robinson, *'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, p. 37.

(²¹) Interview with a Deoband student, Deoband, 29 December 2009.

(²²) Interview with Mufti Zainul Islam, Deoband, 30 November 2011.

(²³) Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld (eds). 2006. *Islamic Education, Diversity and National Identity: Dīnī Madāris in India Post 9/11*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, p. 16. Contrary to the dominant perception that Muslim parents in India have a preference for religious education, the Sachar Committee found that only 3 per cent of Muslim children of school-going age go to madrasas. For details, see Prime Minister's High Level Committee. 2006. *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report*. New Delhi: Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, pp. 76-9.

(²⁴) Interview with Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deoband, 2 January 2010.

(²⁵) For a detailed list of countries and the number of students who have graduated from Darul Uloom, see Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi. 1980. *History of the Dar al-Uloom Deoband*, vol. 1, Deoband: Idara-e Ihteman, pp. 339–41. Also see Reetz, 'Deoband Universe'.

(²⁶) Interview with Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deoband, 2 January 2010.

(²⁷) *Times of India*. 2004. 'Darul Uloom Asks Muslims to Respect Hindu Sentiments', *Times of India*, 3 February, available online at timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/Darul-Uloom-asks-Muslims-to-respect-Hindu-sentiments/articleshow/469249.cms (accessed on 12 January 2010).

(²⁸) *Times of India*. 2009. 'Islamic Seminary Terms India "Land of Peace"', *Times of India*, 3 March; *Daily Times Monitor*. 2009. 'Fatwa Declares India "Dar al-Aman"', *Daily Times Monitor*, 3 March, available online at www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\03\03\story_3-3-2009 (accessed on 10 January 2010).

(²⁹) Interview with Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deoband, 8 March 2011.

(³⁰) Praveen Swami shows evidence of the growth of home-grown Islamist terrorism in India, especially after 2002. See Praveen Swami. 2008. 'The Well-tempered Jihad: The Politics and Practice of Post-2002 Islamist Terrorism in India', *Contemporary South Asia*, 16(3): 303–22. See also Taberez Ahmed Neyazi. 2009. 'Global Myth vs. Local Reality: Towards Understanding "Islamic" Militancy in India', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 29(2): 153–9. Home-grown militancy is not confined to the Muslim community; there is also evidence of involvement of Hindu militant groups in acts of terrorism.

(³¹) Interview with Maulana Khaliq Madrasi, Deoband, 8 March 2011. Also see C.G. Manoj. 2009. 'Deoband Intervenes: Muslims Can Do Yoga', *Indian Express*, 27 January, available online at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/deoband-intervenes-muslims-can-do-yoga/415577/> (accessed on 12 February 2010).

(³²) *Times of India*. 2009. 'Hindus Can't Be Dubbed 'Kafir', Says Jamiat', *Times of India*, 24 February, available online at timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Hindus-cant-be-called-kafir-Jamiat/articleshow/4179187.cms (accessed on 10 January 2010).

(³³) During my interaction with Deoband faculty members, I found that some of them preferred to use the term kafir, arguing that it does not have any derogatory connotation and can be used against a Muslim as well.

(³⁴) Manjari Mishra. 2011. 'Darul Uloom Deoband Urges Hindus, Muslims to Unite on Gita', *Times of India*, 22 December, available online at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-12-22/india/30546086_1_darul-uloom-deoband-hindus-muslims (accessed on 24 December 2011).

(³⁵) Arpit Parashar. 2008. 'Darul Uloom Throws Its Weight Behind Women's Quota Bill', *Indian Express*, 10 May, available online at www.indianexpress.com/news/darul-uloom-throws-its-weight-behind-womens-quota-bill/307654/ (accessed on 16 January 2010).

(³⁶) Parashar, 'Darul Uloom Throws Its Weight'. The support for the Bill is at the individual level and does not reflect Deoband's position on the issue of women's reservation.

(³⁷) S. Raju. 2009. 'Religious Leaders Join Hands for Green Mission', *Hindustan Times*, 20 November, available online at www.hindustantimes.com/Religious-leaders-join-hands-for-green-mission/H1-Article3-478212.aspx (accessed on 16 January 2010).

(³⁸) The declaration starts by saying:

Islam is the religion of mercy for all humanity. It is the fountainhead of eternal peace, tranquility and security. Islam has given so much importance to human beings that it regards the killing of a single person [as that] of killing the entire humanity, without differentiation based on creed and caste. Its teaching of peace encompasses all humanity. Islam has taught its followers to treat all mankind with equality, mercy, tolerance and justice. Islam sternly condemns all kinds of oppression, violence and terrorism. It has regarded oppression, mischief, rioting and murdering among severest sins and crimes.

For details, see Darul Uloom. 2008. 'Declaration: All India Anti-Terrorism Conference', 25 February, available online at www.darululoom-deoband.com/english/index.htm.

(³⁹) Zia Haq. 2008. 'Darul's Global Fatwa on Terror', *Hindustan Times*, 1 June, available online at www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/india/Darul-s-global-fatwa-on-terror/Article1-314490.aspx (accessed on 22 December 2009). See also Mohammed Wajihuddin. 2008. 'The Ulema Strike Back', *Times of India*, 15 June. The fatwa states: 'Islam rejects all kinds of unwarranted violence, breach of peace, bloodshed, killing and plunder and does not allow it in any form. It is a basic principle of Islam that you assist one another in the pursuit of good and righteous causes and you DO NOT COOPERATE with ANYONE for committing sin or oppression.' Emphasis in original.

(⁴⁰) Thomas Friedman. 2009. 'America vs. the Narrative', *New York Times*, 28 November, available online at www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/opinion/29friedman.html

(⁴¹) *Times of India*. 2008. 'Muslims Divided over Fatwa on Terror', *Times of India*, 11 November.

(⁴²) Interview with Maulana Shaukat Qasmi Bastavi, Deoband, 29 December 2009.

(⁴³) Interview with Syed Shakil Ahmad, New Delhi, 31 December 2009.

(⁴⁴) *Indo-Asian News Service*. 2009. 'Give Up Arms, Muslim Clerics Tell Terrorists and Maoists', *Indo-Asian News Service*, 3 November.

(⁴⁵) Vishal Arora. 2009. 'A Year Later, Muslims Refused to Bury Terrorists' Bodies', *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 December.

(⁴⁶) Avijit Ghosh. 2005. 'Women in Polls, a Religious Issue: Deoband V-C', *Times of India*, 24 August.

(⁴⁷) *Hindustan Times*. 2005. 'Deoband Forms Panel for *Fatwas*', *Hindustan Times*, 26 August.

(⁴⁸) *Indian Express*. 2009. 'Jamiat Resolution on Vande Mataram is Unacceptable: Khurshid', *Indian Express*, 15 November, available online at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/jamiat-resolution-on-vande-mataram-is-unacceptable-khurshid/541715/> (accessed on 10 January 2010).

(⁴⁹) *Plus News Pakistan*. 2009. 'Muslim Intellectuals Oppose Deoband on Vande Mataram', *Plus News Pakistan*, 23 November.

(⁵⁰) *NDTV*. 2010. 'Fatwa to Working Muslim Women: Don't Talk to Male Colleagues', *NDTV*, 11 May, available online at <http://www.ndtv.com/news/india/fatwa-to-working-muslim-women-dont-talk-to-male-colleagues-24731.php> (accessed on 22 September 2010).

(⁵¹) *Times of India*. 2010. 'No 'Fatwa' against Muslim Working Women, Says Deoband', *Times of India*, 12 May.

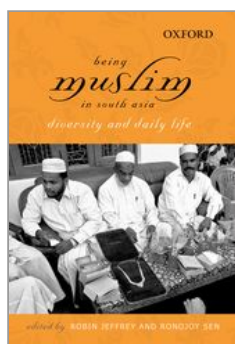
(⁵²) Interview with Maulana Shaukat Ali Qasmi, Professor at Darul Uloom Deoband and general secretary of Rabta Madrasah Islamia Arabia (All India), Deoband, 29 December 2009.

(⁵³) Interview with Maulana Riyasat Ali Bijnori, Deoband, 28 December 2009.

(⁵⁴) M. Hasan. 2009. 'Row among Clerics over Central Madarsa Board', *Hindustan Times*, 27 November, available online at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/480371.aspx> (accessed on 16 January 2010).

(⁵⁵) Interview with Mufti Zainul Islam, Deoband, 30 November 2011.

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'Being Muslim' in Contemporary India

Nation, Identity, and Rights

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter endeavours to capture contemporary identity consciousness of the Muslim citizens of India, incorporating its various dimensions—cultural, instrumental, spiritual, and political—on the basis of narratives recorded in the city of Delhi. Muslim narratives recorded here refuse to tread a singular trajectory; and in doing so underscore the imperative to talk in terms of a plurality of Muslim subjectivities. The Muslims of contemporary India unequivocally renounce the idea of a Muslim nation in their endeavour to confront the stigma of Partition. On a similar note, the inventiveness of Muslim religio-political consciousness in dissociating from the theological bipolarity of *dar-ul-Islam* and *dar-ul-harb* while adopting the idea of *dar-ul-aman* (a place of peace where Muslims are not constrained in religious practice) is noteworthy. However, the phantasmagoria of unity, uniformity and cultural homogeneity imagined in the narratives is punctured in varying degrees by the caste, gender or regional constraints.

Keywords: identity, Muslims in India, Delhi, ummah, ideological diversity, plural identities, cultural heterogeneity

This chapter endeavours to capture contemporary identity consciousness of the Muslim citizens of India, incorporating its various dimensions—cultural, instrumental, spiritual, and political—on the basis of narratives recorded in the city of Delhi. However, before we attempt to construct abstract analytical models based on these articulations, it is important to recognize that a sample truly

representative of various Muslim communities is next to impossible. Given the vastness of the universe—13.4 per cent of the Indian population counted in the last census—the effort here is to capture the heterogeneity of ideologies and views impinging upon community formation and the contours of the minority discourse in India.

(p.202) As Table 10.1 testifies, the sample that finally emerged bears a healthy diversity across the indices of age, education, profession, religiosity, caste/*biradari*, and also gender. The city itself offers a great diversity, reflecting both the laid-back charm of the old city as much as the impulsiveness and hastiness of the new professions and entrepreneurship that the Muslims have started to register their presence in. The pattern is quite evident in the development of the city. While the walled city, part of the central district, reflects the old grandeur—with the remnants of Mehrauli village too making a similar claim—new areas in the south district, especially Batla House, emerged, owing to the influx of Muslim professional and business classes from late 1970s onwards (see Table 10.2). Over the years, the locality has undergone an exponential expansion, claiming new areas such as Shahin Bagh, Abul Fazal Enclave, Noor Nagar, Ghaffar Manzil, Jauhary Farms, and Okhla Vihar within its fold. North-east Delhi, with its hugely populous enclaves like Seelampur, Jafrabad, Welcome Colony, and Seemapuri is yet another site where large Muslim populations, belonging particularly to the unorganized but skilled working class can be found. The central, north-east, and south districts comprise the bulk of Delhi’s Muslim population. Further, the city over the years has acquired a new character with suburbs such as Gurgaon, Noida, Faridabad, and Ghaziabad emerging as industrial hubs. A substantial section of the workforce in such industries, as per observational data, comprises Muslims emigrating from the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Being the seat of political authority, Delhi is also the repository of political consciousness of variegated ideological hues among Muslims. This is underscored by the fact that most Muslim organizations with an all-India profile have their central offices located in Delhi. Thus the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Hind in Jamia Nagar, All India Milli Council, All India Muslim Personal Law Board, and All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat in the Batla House, the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH) at ITO, and the All India Organization of Imams of Mosques at K.G. Marg to name a few, dot the landscape of Delhi. Community-specific newspapers and journals such as *Milli Gazette*, *Muslim India* (before it became irregular), *Al-Yaum Weekly*, *Sahafat Daily*, *Radiance*, *Kanti* (Hindi and Urdu organs of JI), *Jamiat* (newsletter of JUH), *Saifi Samachar* (organ of the Saifi community), **(p. 203)**

Table 10.1. Biographical Profile of Respondents

No.	Gender	Caste	Education	Age	Religiosity	Affiliation/ Occupation
1.	Male	Abbasi (Sakka)	Intermediate	28	Occasional namaz	Entrepreneur, crane service in Gurgaon
2.	Male	Shaikh	Informal, Class 6	68	Highly religious	General Secretary, Masjid Madrassa Hussaina
3.	Female	Pathan	Graduation	21	Non-ritualistic	Student, Jamia Millia Islamia
4.	Male	Shaikh Siddiqui	Informal, Madrassa	28	Highly religious	Madrassa teacher, Madrassa Abdul
				28		Mannan Shahi Masjid, Vasant Vihar
5.	Male	Rangrez	MA, LLB	58	Occasional namaz	Editor, <i>Al-Yaum Daily</i> (Urdu)

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No.	Gender	Caste	Education	Age	Religiosity	Affiliation/ Occupation
6.	Male	Iraqi	BA in Arabic; Fazil from Deoband	69	Religious	Editor, <i>Dawat-o-Azeemat</i> ; Member, All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat; Member, Working Committee, All India Muslim Personal Law Board
7.	Male	Meo	Fazil from Madrasa Jamia Rahimia, New Delhi; also diploma in Modern Arabic from Jamia Millia	42	Religious	Imam and Niazi of Madrasa, Taleemul Quran; Member, JUH
8.	Male	Sayyid	BA in English	33	Only Friday prayers	Entrepreneur, runs a printing press in Darya Ganj
9.	Male	Sayyid	PhD	45	Religious	Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University

'Being Muslim' in Contemporary India

No.	Gender	Caste	Education	Age	Religiosity	Affiliation/ Occupation
10.	Female	Labbai	BA	40	Believer, not religious	President, STEPS (Tamil Nadu)
11.	Male	–	Matriculate	65	Highly religious	Secretary, Hakim Ajmal Khan Girls Senior Secondary School
12.	Male	Surjapuri	Fazil from Deoband	55	Highly religious	President, All India Talimul Milli Foundation
13.	Male	Sayyid		66	Highly religious	Vice President, JI Hind
14.	Female	Rajput	BA	19	Religious	Coordinator, Sangwari (a left-wing cultural organization)
15.	Male	–	MSc	35	Religious	Office Secretary, All India Milli Council
16.	Male	Pathan	Informal	87	Religious	Member, Haj Committee
17.	Female	Pathan	MA	53	Not very religious	Member, Muslim Women's Forum

'Being Muslim' in Contemporary India

No.	Gender	Caste	Education	Age	Religiosity	Affiliation/ Occupation
18.	Male	Mappila	BA	21	Religious	Students Islamic Organisation
19.	Male	Ansari	BA	50	Not religious	All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz
20.	Male		MA	25	Not religious	Student

Source: Census of India, 2001.

Table 10.2. District-wise Share of Muslim Population in Delhi, 2001

	All	North-west	North	North-east	East	New Delhi	Central	West	South-west	South
Muslim share	11.72	6.06	16.13	27.24	9.59	6.37	29.88	5.03	4.35	13.85

Source: Census of India, 2001.

(p.205) *Akbar-e-Nao, Wahdat-e-Nau, Maah-e-Noor*, and so on fill up an otherwise adversely skewed public sphere. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) instituted by Muslims and driven towards specifically addressing their development concerns relating to education, health, legal literacy, and security make their presence in the realm of city’s civil society.

Muslim subjectivities captured during the course of these interviews are however not localized. They transgress the boundaries of time and geography drawing in from collective memory and reflecting on contemporary events. Most interviews, barring a few later ones, were conducted within a couple of years after the inter-communal violence of 2002 in Gujarat and more than a decade after the demolition of the Babri mosque. The impact of the bombing of the Twin Towers at New York on 11 September 2001, and the subsequent ‘Islamophobia’ also signal important departures in the formation of Muslim identities. The indelible imprint of these events can be clearly felt in several narratives.

Atiq Siddiqui, the editor of an Urdu daily, felt that over the years, the secular state had failed to live up to the expectations it had initially generated among Muslims. His belief in secular politics was shattered when the *shilanyas* of the Ram temple in Ayodhya was permitted:

For 40 years, I was an active member of the Congress; people in the area still know me as a Congressman. When Rajiv Gandhi allowed the *shilanyas* of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, I was sitting at the Congress office in Dariban Kalan. It is a Hindu-dominated area, and I was sitting with other Congress leaders of the area. Incidentally, I was the only Muslim there. One of the leaders started saying that the Muslims were unnecessarily making a fuss over Babri Masjid. They should take it to some other place and leave the plot for the Ram temple.

A spate of incidents of communal violence involving Hindus and Muslims led many in the community to express scepticism over the constitutional guarantee of equal rights to all citizens irrespective of their religious persuasion. The formal equality was rarely translated into a substantive one, they felt. Mushtaque Siddiqui, a resident of old Delhi, saw the violence against Muslims as a glaring example of persistent inequities that Muslims suffered:

(p.206) What equal rights you are talking of? Agreed that the 1947 riots was an outburst in which both the communities participated, and also suffered. But after 1947, there have been so many cases of communal violence against us: Jabalpur, Ahmedabad, even Delhi. Once this Babri Masjid issue has come up, there have been innumerable incidents of violence against the Muslims. Yet you say that Muslims are considered equal in this country?

For most others, riots were exceptions that did not alter the fundamental character of the state and the society. Anjala Jamal, a 21-year-old-student of social work, S.A. Hassan, Professor of Persian at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Aas Mohammad, a matriculate entrepreneur, saw violence against Muslims as context-specific and essentially an outcome of majoritarianism that prevails among groups in a dominant position. For them it was a question of who was in power rather than the issue of discrimination directed specifically at Muslims. Muslims too were prone to such hegemonic impulses when enjoying such a position. In Aas Mohammad’s opinion for instance:

On a daily basis, I have dealings with people who are mostly Hindus, and there has never been any such problem. Riots take place because whoever is in the majority in the area, they try to assert it. If the majority is of the Hindus, they would like to dominate. Conversely, wherever Muslims are in good numbers, they would bully others. In any case, such activities are the concern of those people who are sitting idle and have nothing constructive to contribute.

S.A. Hassan sought to dissociate religion from violence, arguing that riots were instruments of political polarization. They were oddities and had no bearing on Indian democracy. In consonance, Anjala Jamal affirmed her faith in democracy and secularism of the Indian state. She felt, particularly in the context of Islamophobia across the world, that despite Gujarat in 2002, Muslims were more secure in this country than anywhere else in the world. Maulvi Mohammad Qasim, principal of the Madrasa Taleemul Quran at R.K. Puram, cautioned against castigating the entire state apparatus as acting against Muslim interests during riots. Thus, he averred, even though many in the police force could be seen displaying a communal mindset, there were equally a number of examples, even in Gujarat, when Muslims had **(p.207)** been saved by policemen. It is the impartiality of the rulers that was most pertinent, he asserted.

Stigmatization, Discrimination, and Deprivation

If Goffman is followed, stigmatization perverts ‘normal identity’ in the sense that it confronts and exists outside a given cultural, physical norm. The discriminated self emerges from pervasive stigma attributed to groups and communities. The stereotyping of Muslims—the ‘other’ of the ‘normal’ nation—remains a constitutive element in the minoritization of Muslims. The responses, nevertheless, varied when it came to developing strategies to cope with such stigmatization and discrimination. The reaction of the ‘stigmatised’ while in interaction with the ‘normal’, Goffman points out, vacillates between ‘cowering and bravado’, thus making him/her either shamefaced or aggressive.¹ There is however a third category of response too that the stigmatized displays. Goffman explains this as follows:

It seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human. He bears a stigma but does not seem to be impressed or repentant about doing so.²

Mehboob Ali Zia, an 87-year-old resident of the walled city, was a freedom fighter and later an active member of the Delhi State Congress Committee. His narrative of the partition was an attempt at exorcizing the guilt of partition ascribed by others and borne by many Muslims. The aggression was vivid as he attempted to recreate history:

This is all propaganda. The fact is that even Jinnah sahib was not solely responsible. Maulana Azad had put forth a plan which envisaged India as a loose federation.... This is all there in the government archives. Maulana Azad has referred to this in his book in Urdu, *Taqseem-e-Hindustan*. The **(p.208)** book has been published in Pakistan, therefore the details are twisted. It remained a futile exercise because Nehru, in his speech, asserted that everything would be decided on headcount. Jinnah sahib was a very stubborn person, and Nehru’s speech instigated him to declare that he would settle for nothing short of a separate Pakistan. Had Maulana Azad’s scheme been implemented, India and Pakistan would have been one country.... I had confronted Jinnah sahib many times. The League people once attacked Maulana Azad’s meeting. In retaliation we also went and disturbed one of the meetings of Jinnah sahib. They went ahead and founded Pakistan.... I am not worried about Pakistan. My concern is India and we are comfortable here.

Feroze Khan, a dhaba owner who also doubles up as a faith healer, relied upon his Meo identity and the community’s nationalist credentials to counter the stigma. ‘If Jinnah had put up any such theory, it was a mistake,’ he conceded. This did not deter the Muslim leaders such as ‘Maulana Madani, Maulana Azad, and our late leader of the Meos, Chaudhary Yasin’, from confronting the two-nation theory, Khan averred. On a similar plane, Mohammad Israfeel, a young teacher at the Madrasa Abdul Mannan, Shahi Masjid, Vasant Vihar retorted: ‘Those who wanted Pakistan, they had a vested interest, they shifted. Why should the Muslims who stayed back and have always remained loyal to this country be blamed?’

The stigma of partition translated into suspicion of Muslim loyalty and patriotism. Islamic identity, the Hindutva discourse argues, is transnational and extraterritorial. Maulana Asrarul Haque, a prominent ulama, and founder of the All India Talimul Milli Foundation contested the canard: ‘Muslims are not tenants in this country. They are the owners. They share this status with other

communities and religious groups of this country.’ Mian Fayyazuddin, the owner of Haji Hotel in Jama Masjid questioned the patriotic credentials of those who were casting aspersions on the fidelity of Muslim citizens. And Mushtaque Siddiqui linked the question of patriotism to the targeting of Indian Muslims on charges of terrorism: ‘People with RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] mindset often refer to Muslims as Pakistanis. They blame us for spreading terrorism, but tell me how are the terrorists able to cross over when such a huge contingent of our army is deployed on the borders?’ Mohammad Israfeel wondered: ‘Tell me, Gandhi is the hero of this country and who killed Gandhi? **(p.209)** Was he a Muslim? Who were the people who killed Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi? They were not Muslims. Then why are the Muslims called traitors?’

Stigmatization of Muslims and their cultural practices remains key to the construction of a wounded Muslim self. But does the prevalence of biases and stereotypes perforce translate into a reality of discrimination? To evolve a measure of discrimination with any degree of certainty remains a complex task. Experiences of discrimination are context-specific as much as individual-specific. To a generic question such as: are Muslims in India discriminated against in public employment, educational institutions, in the allotment of housing facilities, and so on, the answer was generally in the affirmative. However, when asked if they had experienced it personally, most respondents circumvented. Atiq Siddiqui went to a school run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and later to the Delhi College (rechristened Zakir Hussain College, Delhi University). He never sought employment, choosing to work in his family business. Siddiqui, who never felt discriminated against, however, was convinced about the preponderance of such practices against Muslims:

There is no doubt about it. One of my friends completed his BA and applied for a job in a private firm. He was asked how he had dared apply despite being a Muslim. In the government sector, the situation is much worse.... Things are difficult even for officers who are Muslims. I know many of them who have suffered.... In every sphere, the Muslims are discriminated against, and this is one of the main reasons why they lag behind.

Neither Nikhat, a student of social work at Jamia Millia Islamia, nor a retired government schoolteacher residing in Ghafloor Nagar, Okhla experienced discrimination personally, but were firm in their belief that it was a reality for most Muslims. Nikhat recounted how her brother, Sajjad, who had completed his MBA from one of the prestigious private institutes in Delhi failed to secure a job in Hindustan Lever although his batchmates were selected. He was also disqualified on account of his religion by a government institute in Chandigarh. ‘Muslims have to be extraordinarily meritorious to succeed,’ she argued. A government schoolteacher held systemic communalization of the polity and the bureaucracy responsible for the backwardness of **(p.210)** Indian Muslims: ‘The entire machinery is communalized.... Muslims are not to be found in decision-

making positions,’ he rued. The rut was even deeper as only those Muslims who had proven themselves to be ‘loyal’ to the establishment were rewarded. ‘Muslims have been rendered as mere vote banks, they are mere coolies on whose back these people ride to power.’

Aas Mohammad, a crane service operator living in Faridabad, runs his business from the industrial enclave of Gurgaon. He is the son of a labourer who has experienced upward mobility in a short span: at the time of the interview, he possessed 10 cranes besides a personal car (model Balero). The findings of the Sachar Committee³ reveal that a large section of the Muslim workforce is self-employed—also reflected in my sample as a majority of those interviewed belong to this category. According to the crane operator, self-employment not only allowed room for creativity, it offered independence and dignity, and was therefore more honourable than serving others.

My father was self-employed, so I decided to take off from there. I advise my brothers also that they should think of starting their own units rather than going for jobs. Jobs are very difficult to secure. It is well known that any government first favours its own *biradari* because they have to get votes from them. These days the Jats are running the government in Haryana, therefore all rules are being bent to favour the Jats. Further, you have to pay a hefty sum to get a government job and it is better to utilize that money to gain self-employment. One can demonstrate one’s skills and creativity. I advise everyone to start their own business and become masters of their own destiny. There is no need to serve others. This head should bow only in front of the Almighty.

Given the diversity of opinions, it is difficult to conclude to what degree the sense of discrimination and stigmatization constitutes an essential element of Muslim consciousness. The range of opinion collated—both informed and uninformed—suggests aggressiveness, even brashness, rather than meekness in face of persistent stigmatization that Muslims face. Notably, a section of the community remains **(p.211)** insulated from the purported alienation, and like the proprietor of Ashu Crane Service, Aas Mohammad, considers itself as part of the ‘normal’ rather than the stigmatized. Their awareness of the stigma and the associated discrimination does not necessarily end with being affected by it; neither does it dissuade them from participating in a world structured by Goffman’s ‘normal’.

Ummah, *Qaum*, and Nationalism

Is a Muslim self-consistent with an Islamic one? In what ways do Muslims in India, a numerical minority, relate to the ideals and institutions of political Islam such as jihad, Hijra, *dar ul-islam* and *dar ul-harb*, *nizam-e-mustafa*, ummah, and *millat*? The question to be asked is whether the Indian Muslim identity is torn between the scriptural ideals of Islam and the conditions of its existence in

plural India? While the classical tension between text and context comes to be an important point of departure for the researcher, what emerges from the study is that the lay conceptualizations might not necessarily be at odds with textual analysis and prescriptions. Textual constructs, even when difficult to emulate, are often idealized and referred to by the subjects. More often than not, classical scriptures and the enshrined injunctions themselves are subject to incessant interpretations and innovations. The respondents in this section are the informed and the opinionated, constituting the political vanguard of the Muslim literati. Community leaders, religious specialists, cultural and political virtuosos, leaders of Muslim subaltern communities, and those active in students’ and women’s organizations are the key respondents. Their formed opinion is then counterpoised with those unformed and unorganized yet significant set of responses, for they reflect the very different ways in which lay Muslims relate and negotiate with these categories.

Indigeneity of Islam and Muslims are the unresolved issues in the nationalist framework. Could Muslims—given the supposed foreignness of their origins—be true nationals? Muslims marshal a plethora of evidence—constitutional legality, historical antiquity, as well as civilizational rootedness—to attest to their nationalist credentials. Maulana Qasmi, a member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the then-general secretary of All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (**p.212**) invoked the constitutional guarantee of equality and religious freedom to ascertain how citizenship and nationality were not contingent on the nativity of faith. The Indic/non-Indic dichotomy was termed by the Maulana as false and lopsided as it obfuscates history:

If the criterion of coming from outside is to be invoked then it is the Brahmins—those who practise untouchability—who are the real aliens. Most Muslims are natives of this land. It was only a small number who came from Arabia. The trading ties between Arabia and India’s coasts—Sindh and Malabar—predate Islam. During the period of the advent of Islam, these traders also carried Islam with them. The bald historical fact is this: most Muslims today are those indigenous to India who accepted Islam. No one can deny this historical fact. The only difference with Aryans is that they came 5,000 years ago.

Safi Akhtar, a native of Darbhanga in Bihar, has an MSc in botany and at time of the interview, was the office secretary at the central office of the All India Milli Council in Batla House. He expressed his wariness over the issue: ‘If there are people raising questions of origin then they should not forget that the ancestors of a large majority of upper-caste Hindus came from elsewhere. Similar doubts can be raised about their nationality as well.’ Akhtar sensed a design to erase the distinctiveness of Muslim identity to merge it with the Hindu one: ‘It is Islam that informs our tradition and cultural practices ... it is Islam that makes our personality distinct from others.’ Mohammad Qasim, a Meo and teacher of

Arabic sought to complicate the subject further: ‘Yes, Islam was born in Saudi Arabia, but it was never meant for the Arabs alone.... We Meos accepted Islam much before the Mughals came to India.... We fought against Babar because he was an invader. Why should we allow anyone to doubt our nationality?’

Given this situation, how would Muslims reconcile the tension between ummah and *qaum*? Which amongst the two would take precedence in the event of a clash between the two identifications? Muslim political consciousness appears divided, as can be seen in the opposing views expressed by JI Hind and JUH. Syed Jalaluddin Umri, the then-vice president of JI Hind, prescribed a dual political behaviour for Muslims: one, when in a minority, and another, when in a majority. In a dominant position Muslims should strive to **(p.213)** establish an Islamic state and be governed by the laws of sharia. For the Muslims in minority situation, the JI advised a remarkable elasticity of approach. They were counselled to follow the law and constitution of the country of their residence: ‘As a minority they have to lead their lives in accordance with laws of the country.’ Umri preferred to describe the Indian situation as *dar ul-harb*. At the same time, he felt that the dichotomy was inapplicable to present times: ‘What will you call Pakistan? Muslims are in a majority, but they are not governed by the sharia. Neither is it *dar ul-islam* nor *dar ul-harb*.’

Maulana Asrarul Haque—a native of Kishanganj in Bihar, a Congress member of parliament (MP) and a member of the JUH—saw no contradiction between ummah and nation. Ummah was cast in universal terms as the entire humanity: ‘The entire humanity is our brotherhood because we are children of the same Adam and Eve.’ It was obligatory for all Muslims to come to the rescue whenever any section of the ummah was in crisis, he held. Thus, the message of Islam was universal, liberated from the narrow confines of race, language, tribe, and family ties. ‘To that extent, nationalism is antithetical to Islam, but it is also true that in the history of Islam, there have been periods when nation states were formed,’ he conceded. In the Indian context, the Maulana saw no tension between Islam and nationalism because the constitution guarantees freedom of conscience; ‘in return, this is our responsibility that we should uphold the honour and dignity of this land, and be prepared to lay down our lives to protect its sovereignty’. India, for him, was neither *dar ul-islam* nor *dar ul-harb* but an altogether third category, *dar ul-aman*: ‘This debate over *dar ul-islam* or *dar ul-harb* is stale now. The only question relevant is whether it is *dar ul-aman* (land of peace) or *dar ul-fasad* (land of conflict). A country where law and constitution ensure peaceful coexistence and give equal rights can be declared *dar ul-aman*.’

Following this, the associated idea of jihad also came to be contested. The difference between the JUH and JI views, as reflected in the thoughts of Maulana Asrarul Haque and Jalaluddin Umri is significant. Since the JI flirts with the idea of *dar ul-harb* to refer to lands where Muslims are not governed by Islamic law, a comprehension of jihad as a holy war prescribed for Muslims follows. A fine

distinction is however drawn—purportedly to denounce acts of terror—between violence as individual action and that obligated by the Islamic state: **(p.214)** ‘In Islam, no individual action can be passed off as jihad. Most people are not clear on this, particularly, the youngsters.’

On the contrary, in Maulana Asrarul Haque’s rendition, jihad was divorced from its inextricable association with violence and war. Jihad, in this sense, is *jaddo-jahad* or a relentless effort to achieve certain ideals. The meaning of the term cannot be enclosed within a narrow or restricted definition. Indeed, it hinges on the context. Jihad is engaged with one’s self as also against the tyranny of the other. Both history and theology bear witness to it:

In Quran, the word jihad is used in a number of places. Not everywhere is it in the context of war. There is jihad in convincing the other without using any sort of coercion. This has been called *jihadul kabeer*. There is another Quranic verse according to which, if your parents are restraining from accepting Islam, you shouldn’t accept their religion either. At the same time you should not bequeath all your duties towards your parents. This is also jihad.... In another verse, God’s message is that if they struggle (*jaddo-jahad*) on His path, there will be no dearth of ways to reach him. Jihad has also been equalled with resistance against tyranny.... In India for instance, the struggle for independence has been called by the ulama as *jihad-e-azadi*.

The debate within the orthodoxy notwithstanding, the sociological imperative to comprehend reality can only be half achieved without perspective from the everyday world. In what ways have ordinary Muslims reflected and reproduced ideas, thoughts, and recommended actions emerging from classical Islam? Does scriptural or high Islam of the orthodoxy influence a Muslim’s political behaviour to any verifiable extent? A reified identity discourse often turns a blind eye to the politics of the average and the quotidian. The ideas here are unformed, struggling for want of attention, and often unorganized and ephemeral, as also susceptible to contradictory pulls. Aas Mohammad’s fundamental identification was with *watan*, the land of his birth and from where he drew his livelihood: ‘My *watan* is India and not Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. If I am in trouble, it will be my fellow Indians who would come to my help.’ Tanveer Hassan, a 33-year-old entrepreneur running his own printing unit, felt that the tension between *qaum* and *ummah* was irrelevant: ‘If you are a Muslim then you have to believe in Mecca. Mecca can’t come to India.’

(p.215) Opinions across the spectrum seemed categorical in rejecting the thesis of a distinct Muslim nation. While *ummah* and nation were clearly spelt out as distinct realities in most renditions, *qaum* had multiple usages and was deployed to refer to a range of collectivities: namely, a caste group, a religious community, as well as common Indian nationality. Feroze Khan was explicit in

rejecting religious nationhood. For him, *qaum* was neither a nation nor a religious community; the term was rather reserved to refer to the Meos, his caste group:

We are local converts. Many from our *qaum* accepted the religion of Islam in the period of great Sufi saint, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. Till recently people of my *qaum* shared many rituals with our Hindu brethren. We even had common names. Until 1960, my late father’s name was Buddha. This was widespread and whether Hindu or Muslim, we consider ourselves one *biradari*.

For Mushtaque Siddiqui, Muslim nationalism was an oxymoron, and Pakistan, its product, a proof of its failure. He said that he had never considered visiting Pakistan though he had many relatives settled there: ‘I have not even got my passport made. What is the need? This is my *mulk*, my *watan*. This land belongs to both the communities.’

Ali Anwar Ansari, a backward class leader sought to foreground a different memory of partition by declaring Muslim nationalism as a project of the *ashrafs* amongst Muslims. Muslim artisans, weavers, and other occupational castes, according to Anwar, had vigorously opposed Jinnah’s Muslim nationalism—a fact obliterated in nationalist historiography:

A CID report states that in 1941 thousands of Muslims weavers under the banner of Momin Conference and coming from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh descended upon Delhi, demonstrating against the proposed two-nation theory. A gathering of more than 50,000 people from the unorganized sector was not usual at that time, so its importance should be duly recognized. The non-*ashraf* Muslims constituting a majority of Indian Muslims were opposed to partition but sadly they were not heard. They were firm believers of Islam yet they were opposed to Pakistan.

(p.216) Despite their avowed belief in the common Indian nationality and protestations repudiating the two-nation theory, for Anwar, the state of backward Muslims remained unaltered: ‘At the time of partition, those Muslims who overnight had started wearing Gandhi cap[s], though they had been hardcore Leaguers till a day before, came to form the Muslim leadership of independent India. These turncoats prospered while those who had staunchly opposed partition were forgotten,’ he complained.

Minority, Minoritization, and Minority Rights

To what extent is the constitutional definition of Muslims as a minority ingrained in the collective psyche of the community? The identification of community as a minority suggests its subjugated existence, its dissonance from the majority, and its dependence on the state for protection and patronage. Not everyone is comfortable with the label minority; indeed, some resist this labelling and the

concomitant minoritization, a process of ‘othering’ aimed at instilling minority consciousness among groups singled out for the purpose. Mian Fayyazuddin, a 65-year-old member of the Congress in the walled city, made his discomfiture explicit:

First of all, I do not agree with the qualification, ‘minority’, attached to the Indian Muslims. See, it was the Muslims who initiated the national movement.... When we were equal participants in the freedom struggle then why are we denied our rightful share? Why are we referred to as a minority? The Muslim leaders who accepted this minoritization of Indian Muslims should be blamed [for this], rather than those from the other communities. This has instilled an inferiority complex, which has become a major hindrance in our progress. We are left with a begging bowl in our hand.... We are all Indians, and participate in the same Indianness. We are equal participants, so we want nothing short of equal share. Forget minority and majority, these are the creations of politicians to gain political mileage.

The emptiness of phrases such as minority and minority rights was the common refrain of several respondents. Najmul Huda, a research student from Bihar reminded how majority and minority were modern, official imaginaries intended to serve certain political (p.217) exigencies. The constitutional recognition of minority as a category was itself laden with contradictions: ‘On the one hand it does not recognize religion as a social identity marker but on the other hand it enshrines, in the name of preservation of the culture and religion of minorities, clauses that perpetuate such binaries.’ Such constructs, many felt, were the main reasons for continuing Muslim deprivation. Safi Akhtar pointed out how constitutional protection to minorities has remained ineffective in guaranteeing equality to Muslims. ‘We do not want to be treated as second class citizen in this country,’ he protested. Mushtaque Siddiqui averred that by being termed a minority, ‘Muslims had lost their claims for equal share and treatment: Muslims are not a minority in this country, we are the second biggest majority’.

Minority, according to many respondents, was a statistical category and Muslims being numerically preponderant failed to meet the criterion. For Siddiqui, minorities could be those with miniscule populations such as the Christians, the Sikhs, and the Parsis. Numerically, Muslims, according to Siddiqui, were 25 per cent but were reduced to 12–14 per cent in the official figures so as to deny them the status of second majority: ‘If they accept us as the second largest majority, they will be bound to give us a proportionate share.’ This disbelief regarding census figures could be discerned in Najmul’s thoughts too: ‘Many Muslims feel that the state does not want to disclose the exact share of Muslims in the population for political considerations. They feel that it hovers around 17 per cent to 20 per cent.’ Mehmood Ali Zia echoed the view that Muslims were not a minority but a numerical majority, second only to Hindus: ‘There are 20

crore [200 million] Muslims in India. If you take my view, we are not a minority. We are also a majority.’ Unlike Siddiqui however, Zia called for introspection and held the vested interests within the community responsible for pushing the community towards a politics of concessions. Tanveer Hassan, on the other hand, who avowed a Muslim eagerness to participate and contribute in the national mainstream, perceived constructs such as minority as impediments in this regard.

The Authenticity Quotient: Who is a Muslim?

The discourse on minority rights perforce hinges on the idea of an authentic self. For if communities have a right to culture and identity, **(p.218)** what are their core constitutive elements that need be preserved and protected? What qualifies one to be a Muslim? Is it a fundamental association with the tenets, principles, and prescriptions of Islam, or is the Indian Muslim identity a cultural construct woven around artefacts such as Urdu language, a particular reading of Indian history, certain external markers such as sporting a beard, a skull cap, and patronizing a certain cuisine and system of medicine? There could be some for whom Muslim and Islam are overlapping categories wherein ‘Islam is nothing short of a monolithic commitment that overrides all other commitments’.⁴

Amidst such claims of authenticity and absolutism, is there room for a more negotiated Muslim identity to emerge, survive, and flourish? For theorist Akeel Bilgrami, despite an absolutist portrayal of Islam and Muslims, ‘there is no reason to doubt that Muslims, even devout Muslims, will and do take their commitment to Islam not only as one among other values, but also as something that is itself differentiated internally into a number of, in principle, negotiable detailed commitments’.⁵ Cohen’s symbolic construction of community seems to acquire relevance here. For Cohen, in people’s experience, the reality of community exists in terms of their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols. The sharing of symbols however does not amount to the sharing of meaning. Therefore, this commonality does not translate into uniformity: ‘it does not close behaviour or ideas. It is a commonality of form (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members’.⁶ The formulations of Muslim-ness, as the interviews suggest, though largely drawn from a common repertoire of symbols, are ascribed multiple meanings by the respondents.

The formation of the self necessitated a constant dialogue with and comprehension of the ‘significant other’, namely, the non-Muslim, the irreligious kafir, the Ahmediya or the renegade self. For a religious cleric like Maulana Asrarul Haque, a Muslim is one who adheres to **(p.219)** the preaching, norms, and value system stipulated by Islam. In addition, he is also required to have a universalistic vision:

A Muslim is a person who leads his spiritual and temporal life in accordance with the edicts of Allah and his Prophet.... He should have sympathies with entire humanity. This should be reflected in his actions too. A Muslim is a person who holds the reputation that he would never lie, cheat, or would never usurp anyone’s land and property. He is one who cannot bear anyone’s pain; he is just and treats everyone as equal.

Maulana Qasmi too refrained from advocating any closed definition or assigning any fixed boundary: ‘If one considers oneself to be a Muslim and wishes to remain a Muslim, then no one can stop him from remaining one ... the entire mankind is Allah’s family. This does not mean Muslims alone but all—Harihars, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs are His family. How can we make distinction between them?’ The Maulana’s expansive and amorphous portrayal of a Muslim failed to impress Jalaluddin Umri, the JI chief. In Umri’s interpretation, the agnostics, the sceptics, and the irreligious could hardly be accommodated in the Muslim identity. The Muslim identity, he opined, was indistinguishable from an Islamic one. A Muslim is ‘a person who believes that Islam is a religion revealed by God ... he should accept all its injunctions, guidance, and law and lead a life accordingly’. All those who were non-believers could be termed as kafirs. ‘Islam makes only two distinctions: believers and non-believers. Kafir is a term reserved for one who is a non-believer.’ In this sense, the Ahmediyas could be termed as kafir, Umri agreed: ‘The Ahmediyas do not accept Prophet Muhammad as the last messenger of God on earth. They don’t qualify to be Muslims.’

De-Centring the Centre: The Minorities within Minority

The privileging of authenticity that minority rights theorists and proponents often invoke has the effect of obscuring the issues of material (dis)possession and the complexities of domination and subordination within such supposedly vulnerable communities. The prevailing thesis of Muslim deprivation in India rests on two counts: one, the community’s material dispossession and power deficit; and two, the derecognition of what are held to be constitutive elements of ‘Muslim (p.220) culture’. With the rise of hitherto subaltern classes, women and lower castes, the construction of this core Muslim-ness is increasingly being problematized. Do all Muslims, irrespective of their place in social and cultural hierarchy, populate the category of the deprived? Or do material dispossessions of Muslim groups reflect existing status and gender hierarchies? In the politicization of Muslim question, the divinity and pristine purity of tradition itself comes to be deployed as an instrument of domination and control.

Muslim subalterns comprising low-caste *ajlafs* and the *arzals* contest the *ashraf* hegemony by emphasizing the preponderance of caste practices among the Muslims, a reality masked by the professed egalitarianism of scriptural Islam. Ali Anwar, an MP and leader of the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, drew attention towards the discord between the ideals of Islam and the status consciousness

among the Indian Muslim aristocracy: ‘In Islamic principles there is no place for caste, casteism, or untouchability. But among the followers of this faith all these diseases have crept in and continue to survive.’ A schoolteacher at Okhla, of other backward caste (OBC) himself, drew attention to the persisting disparity in educational attainment between *ashrafs* and non-*ashrafs*. In light of this, he disagreed with blanket reservation for all Muslims as an ameliorative strategy:

What the caste system among Muslims has done is that it has excluded groups identified as OBCs in Muslims from the field of education. What is needed now is not reservation for all Muslims but to these sections for 10–15 years so that they are able to rise to the level of *ashrafs* in education. During the zamindari days, it was beyond the imagination of anyone that children from OBC families would go to school. Look at the history of Aligarh Muslim University. Only the sons of *talukdars* and zamindars—all *ashrafs*—studied there. And if by chance any son of a non-*ashraf* got in, it was sheer torture for him. Julaha, Dhobi, Bhangi—he would be taunted no end.

An inverted history produced by the Muslim lower castes challenges the myth of egalitarianism and lays stress on caste as the constitutive unit of Muslim social structure.

A dual process can be seen at work here. On the one hand, a ‘decentring’ wherein the category minority itself is held up for scrutiny and defied for obliterating the inequalities within. On the other, the (p.221) community itself attempts to shore up the material and cultural entitlements that come attached to the concept. Ali Anwar was emphatic:

We are a little scared of this term minority and we consciously use the word *pasmanda*. In words is vested a great power. The word minority hides a reality. In the name of minority our rights are being snatched away. All benefits that are enjoyed in the name of minority are cornered by a few, who do not allow these to percolate down to the majority of this minority. This minority monopolizes everything. There are families which have produced several judges or political leaders. It is not that they are the most meritorious. We have lost our identity in this minority. We have started to use this powerful term *pasmanda* and you will see how vested interests are crestfallen when this term is deployed.

Even as non-*ashraf* politics has been seized of the question of equitable distribution of power and material resources within the Muslim community, gender—though still weak in terms of mobilizational politics—has emerged as yet another axis of problematizing and interrogating the idea of a commonality of minority interests. In particular, activists and scholars have questioned the proposal that the purity of minority cultures needs be preserved as invariably

the burden of maintaining that purity must fall on women. Personal laws become the means through which religious and cultural boundaries are maintained. Modernists and feminist critics view this as a mechanism of controlling women and subject it to multiple readings.

The modern sensibilities of Anjala Jamal for instance led her to raise doubts about the divine origins of the Muslim personal law—typically held sacred by the Muslim traditionalists.

Our maulanas argue that the laws were given in the Quran, and therefore are binding on us. This is an incorrect interpretation—we are not so ignorant as to accept whatever they decree. Quran is a very scientific document, if it prohibits a Muslim from eating pork or taking liquor, there are medical reasons behind it. How could such a patently scientific document hold such a narrow opinion of women? The fact is that the maulanas cannot tolerate the rise of women, and therefore they come up with these spurious arguments. I had gone to Hyderabad to attend a conference on the status of Muslim women where the mullahs were also invited. A constant refrain of the maulanas was that the Muslim woman enjoys so many rights, so why should she insist on a right to divorce? **(p. 222)** Why should she seek to be independent when it is the duty of every man to support his woman? They had such antiquated ideas that I was filled with disgust.

Jamal, however, found it difficult to reconcile with a uniform civil code either, for ‘rather than creating unity, it might create fissures in society’. She favoured a process of reform from within the community, alongside state intervention. Given the conservative stranglehold over the community, she however appeared apprehensive about the political will to usher in reforms, either internally or externally: ‘I am sure the government shall never do it. Every government wants to remain popular and the Muslims constitute a big vote bank. The maulanas control this vote bank and no government would dare to upset them.’ Nahid Khan, Jamal’s mother and an activist with the women’s wing of a left organization, felt that to accommodate concerns of gender equity reform was critical: ‘A law that privileges men in almost all spheres of life is demeaning towards women and their individuality.’ A similar position was echoed by D. Sharifa, activist of the Tamil Nadu Women’s Jamaat.

The liberal sensitivity of Nahid Khan and Anjala Jamal led them to interrogate the tradition with the objective to reform it, which is tantamount to eroding the divinity of the sharia and its derivative, personal law. The hegemony of the theological discourse within the community ensures that tradition remains frozen in time. Thus, it is held by both men and women that a reform through human intervention is a transgression in the exclusive preserve of the divine. Uzma Naheed, a member of the Muslim Personal Board, upheld the sharia as

divine and hence inviolable. The sharia or tradition was gender-just; the fault lay in the customs and practices that frequently sullied it. Naheed’s Islamic feminist convictions motivated her to fight for the rights guaranteed in Islamic law. In this approach, markedly different from that of Anjala Jamal and Nahid Khan, tradition is invoked rather than initiating reforms to change it:

Mehr (dower) is a right which Islam has given to women but its payment is generally considered unnecessary. Wives are very often coaxed to exempt their husbands from its payment because therein lies their spiritual and material well-being, they are told ... as is proven by *Hadith* that at the time of Hadrat Fatima’s marriage the Prophet (pbuh [peace be **(p.223)** upon him]) asked Hadrat Ali what assets he had. He said that all he had was a small water-skin, an armour and a mat. The Prophet asked him to sell the skin and fixed the mehr at 500 dirhams.⁷

Muslim narratives recorded here do not suggest any cementing of boundaries or fixity of ideas. They flout treading a singular trajectory and in doing so, underscore the imperative to talk in terms of a plurality of Muslim subjectivities—not necessarily in harmony with each other. In no uncertain terms, the Muslims of contemporary India dissociate themselves from the idea of a Muslim nation in their endeavour to confront the stigma of partition. However, the phantasmagoria of unity, uniformity, and cultural homogeneity imagined in the narratives beginning with ‘minority’, then ‘nation’, and now again ‘minority’ is punctured in varying degrees by the caste, gender, or regional constraints. The occasional openness of Muslim consciousness to experimentations such as in the case of the ideas associated with jihad, *qaum*, or *dar ul-aman* is noteworthy, as also its remarkable adjustment with modernity and its associates, whether secularism or nationalism. In displaying such a tendency Muslims are not necessarily unique—neither would it be methodologically prudent to portray them as such.

Notes:

(¹) Erving Goffman. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 18.

(²) Goffman, *Stigma*, p. 6.

(³) Prime Minister’s High Level Committee. 2006. *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India: A Report*. New Delhi: Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.

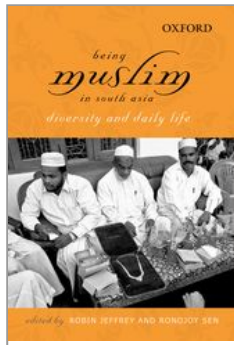
(⁴) Akeel Bilgrami. 1992. ‘What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity’, *Critical Inquiry*, 18(4): 821–42, see p. 823.

(⁵) Bilgrami, ‘What Is a Muslim?’, p. 824.

(⁶) Anthony P. Cohen (ed.). 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Chichester, London, and New York: Tavistock Publications, p. 20.

(⁷) Uzma Naheed. 2005. ‘Islamic Perspectives’, *Milli Gazette*, 1–15 June.

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Transnational Networks, Political Islam, and the Concept of Ummah in Bangladesh

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Abstract and Keywords

Against the backdrop of the emergence of nation states, the Islamic concept of Ummah, or Muslims' global brotherhood, may seem to be an imaginary concept since Muslims live in various nation states under state-given identities. However, in the milieu of increasing transnational activities of Islamists, the Islamic concept of Ummah receives renewed scholarly attention. By using an array of transnational activities and networks such as migration, the Internet, NGOs and scholarly networks, Islamists are capable of disrupting national politics. For that purpose, Islamists manipulate the meaning of Ummah and pose renewed threats to the state-given identities of Muslims and to the state itself. The essay takes Bangladesh, a south Asian Muslim-majority country, as a case to understand political relevance of Ummah. Ummah has political relevance in Bangladesh where various Islamist parties interpret Ummah politically and propagate its narrow interpretation through transnational networks.

Keywords: ummah, Bangladesh, transnational, global brotherhood, political parties, political Islamist, identity conflict, nation state

On the afternoon of Friday, 22 February 2013, many people in Bangladesh were shocked to see angry Bangladeshis burning national flags and demolishing Shaheed Minars in various places in the country in protest against what they said was disrespectful writing about the Prophet Muhammad and Islam by a few Bangladeshi bloggers. Those angry young Bangladeshis were participating in a

countrywide protest, organized by Islamist parties, to demand the death penalty for those bloggers and enactment of a blasphemy law.

Interestingly, this incident took place at a time when some of those 'blasphemous' bloggers were leading a movement to demand the death penalty for leaders of the largest Islamist party, the Bangladesh (p.225) Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), who were facing trial for committing crimes against humanity during Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. From 5 February 2013 onwards, these bloggers, with direct and indirect help from the Awami League (AL) government, successfully developed a public forum to demand the death penalty for the accused war criminals. For the first few weeks, thousands of people from all walks of life, who otherwise did not participate in political rallies, flocked to Shahbagh, a busy city intersection in the capital Dhaka, to express solidarity with the movement for justice over the memory of 1971. Almost all the major newspapers and television channels covered 'Shahbagh square' as a story of the highest importance. Even the state-run Bangladesh Television covered Shahbagh square live. Week after week, television footage showing people hoisting national flags, singing national anthems and country songs were broadcast nationally, internationally, and round the clock. Hundreds of such images were published in national dailies. An aura of high nationalism and patriotism embedded in extensive media coverage was seemingly sweeping across the country.

In this time of high nationalism, the images of burning national flags and disrespect for the highly significant monument of nationalism, the Shaheed Minar, triggered nationwide criticism. The protests by young Bangladeshis dressed in traditional Muslim attire turned deadly. To control the situation, the police opened fire on the protesters. As a result, at least 4 people were killed and 1,000 more were injured in defending, as they saw it, the *honour of Islam* and demanding capital punishment for bloggers who, as the bloggers saw it, were leading a *patriotic movement*. Moral certainty was claimed on both sides. In the aftermath, clashes with the police continued under different political banners of the Islamists. Islamists accused the AL government of being against Islam. To calm the situation, on 26 February 2013 the government sent a text message to all Bangladeshi mobile users stating that the government was determined to stop abusive and disrespectful remarks about Islam and the Prophet. Through extensive media coverage an old debate had sprung back into the public domain: is Islam against Bengali nationalism? Why were some Bangladeshis so upset that they did not hesitate to burn and demolish national symbols—flags and the Shaheed Minar? Who were they? Were they Bangladeshis? Is there (p.226) any conflict between being a Muslim and a Bangladeshi? Is there any end to this paradox?

In this chapter, I argue that the idea of being a Muslim above being a Bangladeshi derives from the Islamic concept of ummah. Ummah in general refers to the global community of Muslims. Since the world is now divided into at least 192 countries, citizens of these countries are officially known after the name of their states—for example, British, American, Bangladeshi, Indian. In this context, the concept of ummah seems politically irrelevant. However, this chapter argues that the ummah has a serious political relevance in Bangladesh. I further argue that various transnational networks of Islamists are instrumental in fostering the political relevance of ummah. I propose a typology of these networks. I argue that my findings not only underpin the political relevance of the Islamic concept of ummah in Bangladesh, but also depict the contested relationship between Bangladeshi nationality and the ummah, vividly illustrated by the burning of national flags over perceived humiliation to Islam.

Significance

There is a dearth of literature about political Islam in Bangladesh. According to one estimate, 'Among the twenty-eight major anthologies published in the West in recent years on the experience of Islamic revivalism and Islamization in the Islamic world, only two have included chapters on Bangladesh.'¹ Amid this limited pool of research, studies of Islam and political Islam primarily focus on: (a) the operational pattern of Islamist terrorists,² (b) secular-religious **(p.227)** conflict,³ and (c) women and political Islam.⁴ Among these studies, **(p.228)** Riaz examines transnational trajectories of Islamists.⁵ However, his approach lacks understanding of the diverse nature of political Islam and the influence of the transnational paradigm of ummah in expanding transnational networks of Islamists in Bangladesh. Thus, my hypothesis needs to be seen as an effort to develop a new approach to understanding political Islam in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh, the third or fourth largest Muslim country in the world, was a liberal democracy before the 2014 elections. During the British colonial period (1757–1947) it was part of the Indian subcontinent and was known as the East Bengal and in the postcolonial period it was part of Pakistan (1947–71) and known as East Pakistan. It emerged as an independent country premised on 'secular-nationalist' principles following a bloody nine-month war with Pakistan in December 1971. Economically, Bangladesh is among the world's poorest nations with a per capita income of US\$1044.⁶ According to the website of the Bangladeshi government, 'It has a population of about 152–51 million where about 88% of the people are Muslims and over 98% of the people speak in Bangla.'⁷ Its legal and judicial system owes its **(p.229)** origin mainly to 200 years of British rule, although some elements are remnants of the pre-British period and earlier Hindu and Muslim administrations.⁸

A total of 32 political parties were registered in Bangladesh by the Election Commission (EC) in 2012. However, the politics of Bangladesh was dominated by two parties—the liberal AL League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).⁹ The largest Islamist party, the Bangladesh JI, was said to be the third most influential party of the country. In 2013, the BNP headed a right-leaning, 18-party electoral alliance, which encompassed most Islamist parties, including the JI.¹⁰ During this time, the AL was in government and led a 14-party alliance that included the major left-leaning parties.¹¹ A sharp polarization between the secular and the non-secular was vivid in Bangladesh politics. It would, however, be an impractical approach if one evaluated the political activities of ‘Islamist’ parties in Bangladesh in terms of their registration with the EC. Although only eight Islamist parties were registered with the EC, the number of Islamist parties that operated covertly and without EC regulation exceeded a hundred.¹² Riaz divides Islamists into three categories: those who participate in the existing political system, those who work within the democratic political system despite reservations, and those who refuse to take part in constitutional politics and remain clandestine.

Transnational Political Islam and the Ummah

A series of violent events—such as the riots against the film *Innocence of Muslims* in 2012, the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Taliban’s ‘holy jihad’ against the West, the rise of Hizbullah in Lebanon, the car bomb attack on the World Trade Center complex in Manhattan in 1993, the 9/11 attacks in New York, and the bombings in London **(p.230)** on 7 July 2005—underpins the political significance of the ummah for Islamists. Most of these terrible acts were carried out under the banner of ‘Muslim’ identity: any state-given identity—for example, Sudanese, Egyptian, and so on—seemed inconsequential for the people who carried out the attacks against Western interests. These events indicated that ‘political Islam’ was a transnational force capable of disrupting, though not necessarily changing, the normal flow of international currents across nations and between states.¹³

However, these events suggest only one side of political Islam. As Esposito notes, ‘There are Islamists and Islamic organizations that reject violence and espouse political liberalization and democratization.’¹⁴ Bangladesh is part of this scenario. With the centrist Bangladesh JI participating in the democratic system on one hand and the rise of a global Islamist party such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh in the middle, there were also waves of Taliban-style terrorist aggression in the form of suicide bombings in courts, assaults on workers of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and grenade attacks on journalists and foreign diplomats. All this happens against the backdrop of West-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Political Islam in Bangladesh is closely connected with transnational networks. As Ehteshami and Mandaville argue, political Islam today is by definition transnational.¹⁵

A theory of transnationalism is based on the idea that control by individual states over cross-border activities of their people is lessening. According to Mandaville, 'transnational' refers to 'a wider range of social formations and transactions which are structured across the border and spaces of nations but which do not necessarily entail a **(p.231)** primary role for sovereign governments'.¹⁶ Al-Rasheed argues that 'transnationalism' is often used interchangeably with 'globalization'. She asserts that 'while globalization is a process from above, the concept of transnationalism embodies activities and process from below'.¹⁷ In this way, an ordinary person, through various transnational flows, challenges the capacity of states to behave in ways consistent with traditional, state-centric, realists' views. Thus, it is fair to argue that transnationalism focuses on non-state actors and entities operating across the borders of states. Rudolph describes the transnational process: it is a self-conscious construction of networks of knowledge and action by decentred, local actors that cross the boundaries of space as though they were not there, and of heterogonous networks, differentiated from each other in terms of specialization: there is not a single network, but many, each fulfilling a different function.¹⁸

The point I want to make is that transnational processes combine various networks that initiate people-to-people contact. For example, networks between diasporas and migrants, various cross-border social movements, and the emergence of online political forums can undermine the control of a state over its territory. Thus, transnational activities shape local politics.

Transnationalism is embedded in Islam. Mandaville argues based on verse 49:13 of Quran that the 'Qur'ān itself enjoins transnationalism by encouraging travel when it says people were made into nations and tribes so that you come to know each other'.¹⁹ Mandaville and Voll argue that 'one of the famous Hadīths exhorts believers to travel far and wide—even in China in search for learning'—which exhibits the essence of transnationalism.²⁰ The expansion of Islam can be interpreted as a transnational **(p.232)** process. In early Muslim history, after Prophet Muhammad's death in the seventh century, different Muslim dynasties—the Umayyad (661–750), the Abbasid (750–1258), and the Ottoman (1299–1924)—expanded beyond Arabia to Europe, Africa, and Asia. Levitt argues that Islam expanded on the backs of various transnational actors—traders, Sufis, conquerors, and colonial administrators.²¹

I argue that the key transnational concept of Islam is the ummah, the community of believers. Mentioned in the Quran 64 times, the ummah thus carries significance for Muslims.²² Saunders asserts that 'the word is more closely linked to the gloss of "people" and is thought to be cognate of the Hebrew "am" and Arabic "ummetha", and is often used in Arabic to denote the Western concept of nation'.²³ In this sense, the ummah denotes a Muslim nation where the territorial boundaries of nation states in the twenty-first century are

insignificant since religious identity (us/them and good/evil) becomes more important. Theologically, the ummah provides a framework according to which it is plausible to argue that Muslims living in the United Kingdom, the United States, Pakistan, Morocco, or other countries are brothers and belong to one community of Muslims. Therefore, it is hard to overlook the 'transnational' element fostering a Muslim-to-Muslim bond, even though the ummah is termed an 'imaginary' concept with no political implication in the contemporary world.²⁴

I have argued elsewhere that radical Islamists have manipulated Quranic interpretations of the ummah.²⁵ The Quran supports the **(p.233)** inclusiveness of the ummah through verses 10:19 and 10:47 where the ummah refers to the whole of humankind and includes non-believers of Islam. However, Islamists in the modern world through politically motivated interpretation of the Quran have made it an exclusive concept.²⁶ As a result, in the contemporary period, ummah denotes the global brotherhood of Muslims only. Hassan argues that psychologically every Muslim in the world likes to think they belong to the nation of ummah alongside their other identities. Thus, the ummah becomes the source of transnationalism in the contemporary period.²⁷

The political relevance of the ummah became effective when influential Islamist theorists, such as Maududi of the JI movement in the subcontinent and Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, distorted the concept of the ummah. They declared that there was a dichotomy between true Muslims and false Muslims. For these political theorists, the ummah was limited to 'true Muslims' who accepted the political interpretation of Islam of Maududi and Qutb. For them, the brotherhood of true Muslims across the world must fight false Muslims and their collaborators.

As a result, various orthodox Islamists such as the Wahhabis and Salafists, as well as the Hizb ut-Tahrir justify their transnational movements and political goals on the basis of this narrow perception of the ummah. The basic tenet of these parties is to establish an Islamic state where the law of the land would derive from Allah in the form of sharia law, and the ruler of this Islamic land would establish a caliphate where a caliph would rule. Some Islamists believe in establishing a separate block in the world for Muslims, borrowing a concept from Sayyid Qutb who advocated such an Islamic bloc, an amalgam of different nation states. He saw 'no necessity for having a single Islamic nation'.²⁸ There are other sides of transnational movements which are more moderate and civil. Nonetheless, a basic precondition for these movements, whether radical, extreme, or moderate, is paramount **(p.234)** allegiance to Muslim identity over state-given citizenship. The interpretation of the ummah is the driving force behind the establishment of cross-border contacts of Muslims.

Transnational Political Islam in Bangladesh

At least five transnational networks are instrumental in the expansion of political Islam in Bangladesh. They are transnational Islamist parties, Islamic NGOs, cross-border movements of people, and transnational scholarly networks.

Transnational Islamist Parties

With an aim of establishing an Islamic government in Bangladesh, the Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh emerged in 2001. This party does not believe in elections; it expands its support through '*dawa*', a popular method among the Islamists to increase activists across the world through peaceful invitation. Hizb ut-Tahrir has very strong support among a section of academics and students in various universities in Bangladesh.²⁹ Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh is a local chapter of the Hizb ut-Tahrir, a transnational political organization formed in 1953 as an Islamist party in Jerusalem. According to the organization's website in 2009, 'Hizbut Tahrir works at all levels of society to restore to Muslims a means of living an Islamic life under the shade of the Khilafah State (Caliphate)'. The website also claims that 'Hizbut Tahrir is active throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, South-East Asia, Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Europe, Australasia and the Americas'. However, it is banned in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, as well as in Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Turkey, and in the former Soviet states in central Asia.³⁰ It is now banned in Bangladesh even though it was not banned at the beginning of its operations.³¹

(p.235) There are other examples. I have written elsewhere about the al-Qaeda and Taliban linkage with a banned Bangladeshi Islamist group, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh, which came to the forefront through a press conference held in 1992 when it demanded that Bangladesh be transformed into an Islamic state.³² Harkat was formed reportedly with funds from al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Its transnational connection was made clear when 'Fazlul Rahman, a leader of the Harkat, signed the official declaration of "holy war" against the US on February 1998 where other signatories included bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri (leader of the Jihad Group in Egypt), Rifa'i Ahmad Taha (aka Abu-Yasir, Egyptian Islamic Group), and Sheikh Mir Hamzah (secretary of the Jamiat Ulema Pakistan)'. The groups issued a slogan: 'Amra Sobai Hobo Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghanistan' (We will all become Taliban and we will turn Bangladesh into Afghanistan).³³

It would be a misrepresentation, however, to suggest that ummah consciousness exclusively applies to radical Islamists and extremists. Evidence suggests that moderate and democratic Islamist parties in different states have contacts with each other. The driving force behind this cross-border linkage is ummah consciousness—recognition of the importance of being Muslim, and of belief in Islamic values in ethics and politics. For example, a press release issued by the Muslim Brotherhood in support of the JI leaders facing trial for committing

crimes against humanity in Bangladesh in 1971 is based on the premise of Islamic justice and Muslim identity:

One of the purposes of our Sharia (Islamic law) is to safeguard people's lives and honour. God Almighty also prohibited injustice for all believers. We must uphold Islam's high values, principles and ideals, which certain parties talk about as they apply them only selectively ... while we reject and condemn these unjust and unfair trials that violate all international norms and conventions, we call upon all States, and in particular Muslim countries ... to apply all pressure to put right these trials and lift the injustice befalling political detainees in Bangladesh and to apply pressure, politically and morally, to stop this human tragedy.³⁴

(p.236) This release was a continuation of pressure applied by the Islamist parties from different countries on the AL government to release leaders of the JI, as these leaders were perceived to be the legitimate representatives of Islam in Bangladesh. In November 2012, the International Conference of Islamic Leaders in Sudan called upon the Bangladesh government to 'immediate[ly] stop of [sic] the ongoing torture and injustice on the Islamist opposition leaders in Bangladesh'.³⁵ Top Islamist leaders and thinkers, including Rachid Ghannouchi of the Tunisian Ennahda, general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Dr Muhammad Badie, and president of the JI Pakistan, Munawar Hasan, warned the Bangladesh government that 'if the repression to [sic] Jamaat leaders do [sic] not stop ... Bangladesh might be segregated from the Muslim world'.³⁶

Islamic NGOs

Various transnational charity organizations have been active in propagating the ideology of political Islam as well as channelling money from outside to local Islamists. The transnational Muslim *dawa* and solidarity organizations such as Rabita al-Alam al-Islami or World Muslim League, and Nadwa al-Alamiya lil-Shabab al-Islami or the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) are among such transnational Muslim charities and organizations that have been involved with the discourse on political Islam. The force that drives these NGOs is to reach Muslim brothers—part of the ummah in foreign lands. In Bangladesh, Rabita, alongside a Saudi-based international NGO, the Al-Haramain Foundation, provided generous funds through various Islamist parties to build mosques, run madrasas, and organize Islamic **(p.237)** NGOs in education and social welfare to neutralize the influence of secular and Christian-sponsored, international NGOs.³⁷ On the other hand, the Islami Chhatrashibir, the student wing of the Bangladesh JI, was a member of the WAMY. Members of the Chhatrashibir visited similar student wings of Islamist parties around the world.

Cross-border Movements of People

Cross-border movement of people has fostered political Islam since British times. Hazi Shariatullah, a peasant, after studying in Mecca for 20 years, initiated the Faraizi movement in Bangladesh on his return home in 1818.³⁸ In his essay, Shah offers examples of Muslims from Bengal travelling to Mecca for the hajj and developing contacts with Muslim jihadists from the Middle East.³⁹ In this way, the hajj can be seen as a transnational political space that affects Bangladesh as well.

The case of Asadullah Ghalib, a former chair of Arabic studies in Rajshahi University and a graduate of Madina University, who formed the radical Ahl al-Hadith Bangladesh in 1994 is noteworthy. In February 2005, Ghalib was arrested on charges of bombings and possession of explosives.⁴⁰ According to Ahmad, a government investigation found that some of the Ahl al-Hadith members travelled to Afghanistan in the 1980s after the Soviet invasion to fight with the Taliban to save Islam. The transnational connection established between the Taliban and Ahl al-Hadith continued until government crackdowns after 2009.⁴¹ Furthermore, the history of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in Bangladesh shows that the movement was started by Golam (p.238) Mowla, a London returnee, who made acquaintance with the London chapter of the Hizb ut-Tahrir during his study in London.⁴² Finally, there is evidence that around 3,000 Bangladeshis during the time of the Soviet invasion crossed international boundaries to fight with the Taliban. On their return they became involved with Taliban-style political Islam in Bangladesh.⁴³ These are some examples of cross-border movement of people promoting political Islam in Bangladesh.

Transnational Scholarly Networks

An Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference held at Mecca in 1977 recommended the establishment of Islamic universities in different Muslim countries. As a result, the government of Bangladesh took initiatives for the establishment of an Islamic University in Bangladesh. With generous aid received from the OIC, the university started operations in 1992.⁴⁴ The establishment of the university can be seen as opening a connection, through which Bangladesh was linked with transnational Muslim scholarly networks. The website of the university in 2009 indicates that a few departments of this university in the Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies (the departments of Al-Quran and Islamic Studies, Da'wah and Islamic Studies, and Al-Hadith and Islamic Studies) have had visits from foreign Muslim scholars as lecturers or guest speakers regularly. The development of scholarly networks worldwide through institutional linkages has provided influential platforms for the expansion of political Islam. On such platforms, advocates can exchange ideas about the nature and future of political Islam. Following the establishment of the Islamic University, a number of private universities were established in Bangladesh with international linkages and Islamic names.

From the websites of such private universities, it is apparent that they have significant connections and collaboration programmes with similar foreign institutions. One of the private universities, for **(p.239)** example, had a collaboration programme with the International Islamic University Malaysia, which was funded by eight member countries of the OIC in 1982 and became 'a major platform where Muslim scholars from the United States, Sudan, Pakistan and many other countries [were] involve[d] in debates about political Islam through its faculty and alumni network'.⁴⁵ Similar institutions exist in Pakistan (for example, the International Islamic University of Islamabad) and Saudi Arabia (the University of Medina). These universities had close connections with the great forebear of Islamic educational cosmopolitanism, Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which has produced scholars and activists for political Islam for hundreds of years. Hassan al-Banna, founder of Muslim Brotherhood; Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, co-founder of Hamas; Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, founder of Hizb ut-Tahrir; Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Afghani, philosophers of Islamic modernism, were all said to be associated with this university.⁴⁶ Even government-run Islamic foundations were willing to manage the recruitment of Bangladeshi students who wanted to study at the Al-Azhar University.

Credit transfers for students of a private university, taken as a sample for this study, reveal that they can be transferred to the Islamic Foundation Leicester, which was established with an initial aim to translate Maududi's work into English by the famous Pakistani scholar Khurshid Ahmad, an activist of JI Pakistan. Ahmad 'helped raise the Islamic consciousness of young Muslims in Malaysia, South Africa, Great Britain, the United States and in many other places'.⁴⁷ Voll notes:

His visits to Muslim groups in South Africa helped define the nature and goals of emerging Muslim Youth Movement, and in Malaysia he was an important element in bringing together the leaders of the majority Malay political party whereas he was also the man behind the establishment of the Islamic Foundation in Great Britain, which has been in the forefront of publishing works that help define role of Muslims as minorities and Islamist classics like Mawdudi's commentary on Qur'ān. These activities help create a cosmopolitan global set of linkages that are crucial in defining the worldview foundation for **(p.240)** political Islam in many different areas. Khurshid Ahmad is only one of relatively large number of internationally and globally active Muslim intellectuals who are important links in the cosmopolitan networks of the contemporary Islamic world.⁴⁸

Thus, it is plausible to argue that the establishment of the state-run Islamic University opened a new corridor for the scholarly growth of transnational political Islam in Bangladesh through institutional linkages. However, these linkages were insignificant in 2012 in promoting rich scholarly debate in Bangladesh about transnational political Islam. Ahmad asserts: 'There is no

dearth of polemical writing—mostly journalistic—that seek to belittle the significance of Islam as a focal point of public life in Bangladesh or to cast aspersions on some orthodox Islamic practices but a serious and sustained critique of the foundational structure of Islamic orthodoxy and its intellectual inadequacies has yet to come.’⁴⁹

Even though Bangladesh was yet to make significant contributions to transnational scholarly debate about political Islam, these institutions through their international collaboration were able to access significant resources—theses and publications about political Islam. These resources enabled young academicians and students to form intellectual circles to discuss issues of Islam and political Islam. Ahmad argues that ‘these circles resemble a spontaneous movement rooted in deep yearning for Islamic intellectual renaissance, but it is equally engendered by dissatisfaction with the current state of Islamic scholarship among the known Islamist groups in Bangladesh’.⁵⁰ According to Ahmad, the reading lists of such groups include Edward Said’s work on orientalism, Malek Bennabi’s Islamic self-criticism, Muhammad Arkoun’s Islamic deconstructionism, Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s and Seyyed Ali Ashraf’s Islamic neo-traditional mysticism, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s *ijtihadic* legal thought. Ahmad argues that ‘one can also see elements of Ali Shariati in this generation of young Bangladeshi Muslim intellectual activism; their scholarly pursuits burst with passion’.⁵¹

(p.241) Internet

The Internet as a transnational space has become an important instrument for Islamists to use to spread their message. In addition to party websites, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and video-sharing sites like YouTube, are increasingly used to proclaim the importance of Islamism in Bangladesh. They are used to connect Bangladeshi Islamists with foreign Islamists to emphasize the importance and strength of pan-Islamism.

The home page of the Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh in 2009 announced its pan-Islamic aim by stating, ‘O Muslims! Hizb ut-Tahrir calls upon you to reject the current kufr government system and fulfill the shari’ah obligation of re-establishing the Khilafah.’ On its homepage, the site hosted a large image of a party procession in the streets of Dhaka. The writing on a banner held by activists was hard to overlook. It said in English, ‘Support and work with Hizbut Tahrir to establish the Khilafah.’ The website of the party also hosted political manifestoes written in Bangla. The titles illustrated its aims:

1. ‘Hizbut Tahrir, Khilafat Sharkar Protishta, desher shartho rokha ebong gono manusher odhikar adayer lokhe Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh er Islami Ishtehar’ (With an aim of establishing a caliphate government, safeguarding the national interest, and establishing the rights of the

masses: the Islamic Manifesto of Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh and Hizb ut-Tahrir).

2. 'Islamer rajnoitik chinta' (Political thought in Islam).

Apart from these manifestoes, the Hizb ut-Tahrir also uploaded images of posters. One poster read: 'Rajab conference Khilafah for Bangladesh.' This website was used as a key resource for activists or interested persons and enabled them to get involved with the party. The organisation also updated images, videos, and news items under the headline of 'Latest Updates' on the website. During my one-month study of the website from 30 June to 31 July 2009, the website was updated between three and seven times each week with news, photo, and video items. The headlines and contents of those items showed the transnational nature of Islamism:

- (p.242)** 1. Three news items about government oppression of Hizb ut-Tahrir activists in Turkey.
2. One eight-minute mobile video about the Rajab conference in Bangladesh.
3. A picture of a conference of Indonesian ulama.
4. A press release titled 'The imperialist kufr powers have failed to suppress the call for the Khilafah; so will their agents', about a conference in Bangladesh.
5. A manifesto of the party calling for rejection of democracy in Bangladesh because it is the brainchild of the West.
6. A press release from Hizb ut-Tahrir Pakistan that condemns the arrest of its activists by the Pakistani government.
7. A press release from Bangladesh that reads, 'Government of Bangladesh has joined hands with Britain in the war against Islam.'

Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh uses Facebook too. Its page title, 'The struggle for Islam in Bangladesh', is in effect an extension of its website. Monitoring this page in 2012-13, I concluded that its goals are transnational. The page aimed to (a) disseminate its global press releases to its Bangladeshi followers; (b) transmit directions and suggestions from Hizb ut-Tahrir's United Kingdom and Australia chapter leaders to Bangladeshi followers; (c) disseminate video documentaries about the crisis of the ummah; and (d) display digital posters, images, and videos of conferences held in Australia and the United Kingdom which focused on the crisis of Islam in Bangladesh.

The mainstream JI also uses the Internet to promote its agenda. Using its website, the JI campaigned against the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) of Bangladesh, set by the AL government to try alleged collaborators, a large section of whom came from the top leadership of the JI. Internet tools enable them to campaign about local politics globally. For example, a letter written by the JI's assistant secretary general, barrister Abdur Razzaq, to the 'Leaders and

Scholars of the Ummah' was published in the *Muslim Observer*⁵² on 14 September **(p.243)** 2010. The title of the letter was 'Briefing on Bangladesh Jamaat e Islami's Current Situation: Ultra-Secularist Government's All-Out Systematic Attack in a Bid to Ban Jamaat & Execute its Top Leaders'. The letter argued that:

1. The AL was an ultra-secular government working against Islam to establish secularism. In this process it set out to crush the JI by executing its top leaders.
2. The ICT was a 'drama' led by communists and secularists and aimed against Islam and JI.
3. Saudi Arabia should intervene to save JI because JI is a movement for Allah's cause.

Any reader of the letter would conclude that JI was the legitimate representative of Islam in Bangladesh and the AL was a party that denounced Islam. However, most studies of the AL concluded that the party did not take a stand against Islam and was very much aware of not hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims in Bangladesh.

JI's student wing, the Islami Chhatrashibir, maintains a Twitter and Facebook account entitled BasherKella (Bamboo Castle). BasherKella is named after Titu Mir, leader of Bengali resistance to British rule, killed by the British in 1831. The Basher Kella was his fortress of bamboo, which the British found surprisingly difficult to overcome. The Facebook page BasherKella generated countrywide protest against the government's indiscriminate shooting of supporters of the JI and Chhatrashibir who took the street to protest the verdict of capital punishment delivered by the ICT against one of their top leaders Delwar Hossain Sayedee in February 2013. With over 95,000 followers, this group uploaded photos, videos, and news of resistance across the country round the clock. Its Twitter account was used to reach the United Nations, international organizations, and Muslim leaders of the world.

Hizb ut-Tahrir in Bangladesh has been able, through use of the Internet, to extend the idea of the ummah to propagate pan-Islamist thought. The Internet has allowed it to bring home to Bangladesh news, images, and videos of its counterparts working in other countries, and, at the same time, keep its overseas counterparts informed of developments in Bangladesh. Such findings emphasize the power **(p.244)** of the Internet as a transnational space and its capacity to reinforce ideas of the ummah.

The discussion in this chapter underlines the political reality of the ummah in Bangladesh, and also highlights the diverse nature of political Islam. A critical

point arising from these findings is that political Islam is not monolithic. Islamists range across a political and ideological spectrum.

Why are these transnational networks attractive to Bangladeshis? Two reasons help explain the increasing allegiance to Islamic identity over Bangladeshi identity. First, the sense of belongingness in the global community of believers that some Bangladeshis experience prompts them to participate in these networks. In this context the ummah acts as a nation. The ummah complies with the concept of a nation as it denotes a group of people (Muslims) who believe they share a common history, customs, and values, which can be collectively deemed to share a particular Muslim culture (Wahhabi, Salafi, or others) where ties are reified through sentiment. The overarching significance of being Muslim serves as the precondition motivating these Bangladeshis to join transnational networks of political Islam. To them, 'Muslim-ness' is above all other identities. Second, the political ambition of the Middle East in modern times has evoked the political reality of the ummah across the 'Muslim world' through a global expansion of Islamic consciousness. This global wave has also engulfed Bangladesh and promoted an Islamic culture that contributed to the expansion of transnational political Islam.

Historically, Middle Eastern states undertook global projects of promoting Islam after the defeats in the 1973 six-day war against Israel during which the United States and other Western countries supported Israel. In response to the Western stance on Israel, Arab countries imposed an oil embargo. The embargo was lifted after six months in March 1974, but a shock went through Western economies. According to US government statistics, world crude oil prices had tripled from the 1973 average to US\$ 12 a barrel.⁵³ Khanna argues that **(p.245)** it was 'during this time that oil became the Arab's geopolitical lever, making the gulf monarchies the world's nouveau riche'.⁵⁴

Realizing their power, Arab countries began to exercise their influence, financing missionary programmes in various Muslim countries.⁵⁵ Bangladesh too received generous support from these rich Muslim countries, as a result of which its secular society and politics became Islamized.⁵⁶ This increased religiosity worked through transnational networks of political Islam—scholarly networks, Islamic NGOs, and the Internet—to extend itself among Bangladeshis. This process exposed the embedded tensions and contested relationships between ummah and nationality in Bangladesh where people negotiated between Islamic identity and state identity.

Such a contested relationship has several implications. First, transnational political Islam threatened state security. Diverse transnational networks fostering Muslim-to-Muslim contact undermined the dominant state-centric concept of managing security for Bangladeshi citizens. For many years, states were the units of action, the definers and guarantors of security.⁵⁷ However, the

emergence of transnational terrorist networks such as Harkat signified the fading role of the state in managing security. Here a self-proclaimed global jihad against the United States became local. Terrorists emphasized a global jihad against the United States in the name of defending the honour of the Muslim ummah.

This brought challenges to Bangladesh. The case of Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh is a case in point. It is not clear when Jamaatul launched its chapter in Bangladesh. Pressure from donors and diplomatic quarters led the BNP-JI government to ban the Jamaatul on 23 February 2005. However, the group made its presence felt by detonating 500 bombs simultaneously throughout Bangladesh on 17 August 2005 and claimed responsibility for further acts of violence, including suicide bombings in courts and throwing grenades at foreign diplomats. In 2007, seven members were convicted of crimes and executed. It was reported that when the judge **(p.246)** was reading the death sentence, one of the Jamaatul members said that 'it was a farcical trial on the basis of British laws and false witnesses'. He continued: 'I think you [judges] have shown that you are disloyal to Allah. It's you who should be condemned to death.'⁵⁸ The denunciation of Western law by a convicted terrorist further underscored the similarity that Bangladeshi Islamists shared with transnational jihadis. These examples highlight the challenge transnational political Islam poses to the security of the Bangladeshi state. But Bangladesh is only one of many Muslim countries fighting a global war in local context.

Second, the contested relationship between nationality and ummah challenges modern politics and leads to demands for the establishment of a 'traditional Islamic system'. For example, the Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects democracy and demands establishment of a caliphate. In Muslim history, after Prophet Muhammad's death, Muslim territory expanded under the first four caliphs, considered as 'rightly guided' because they all knew Muhammad personally and were companions (*sahaba*) of the Prophet. Thus, they knew the Sunnah as directly as possible. The period of the rightly guided caliphs ended in 661 CE with the assassination of Caliph Ali.⁵⁹ Thereafter, various Muslim dynasties, the Umayyads (661–750), the Abbasids (750–1258), and the Ottomans (1299–1924), expanded Muslim rule into Europe, Africa, and Asia. During this period the caliphate system was installed. Sadiq asserts that 'the inception of the Caliphate system through the Umayyads in the seventh century inaugurated a movement for a new civilization and for a dynamic, forward looking culture which was destined to create a composite, corporate human identity, viz., the Islamic identity'.⁶⁰ Langman argues that this was a golden age for Islam. Abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 by Kemal Atatürk **(p.247)** formally marked the end of this civilizational model.⁶¹ Sadiq argues that after the fall of the Ottomans, the classical form of Islam, which provided a composite identity to Muslims, gave way to a narrow, territorial, national identity.⁶² For Muslim political thinkers, the notion of caliphate has always remained an inspiration, direct or otherwise, to

revivalist movements. Indeed, Jackson argues that this memory of Muslim history, featured through the writings of Muslim political thinkers, is a memory determined by authority.⁶³ For influential Muslim political thinkers, the memory of Muslim political authority in the golden age is above all a conceptual inspiration. Such a political concept seems idealistic in the twenty-first century. Hizb ut-Tahrir's political agenda therefore might appear as a distant dream embedded in a distant past. However, according to news reports in 2012 Hizb ut-Tahrir was expanding, and the government of Bangladesh chose to ban it.⁶⁴ This only emphasizes the fact that modern politics faces challenges from older forms of politics and political allegiance in Bangladesh. The *expansion* of older form of politics, however, is a *modern* phenomenon and owes much of its potency to the transnational possibilities of the twenty-first century.

Finally, the power of the Internet has had profound implications for Bangladesh by enabling the expansion of transnational social and political movements of Islamists. The expanding support among urban-educated youths for informal Islamist parties indicates that the Internet plays an important role in the propagation of ideas about the unity of the Muslim ummah. Facebook groups such as 'Struggle for Islam in Bangladesh' emerged, which had more than 3,000 supporters in September 2012. Postings on Islamism to this group from many other Muslim countries signified the potential role of the Internet in shaping Muslim consciousness in Bangladesh. In 2012, a large number **(p.248)** of youths were not happy with state of politics. Corruption and nepotism resulted in Bangladesh being featured among the most corrupt nations in the world, according to Transparency International's global corruption index.⁶⁵ Such frustration of youths in politics was acknowledged by the Communications Minister in the AL government: 'Most of the younger generation writes on [their] Facebook profile that they hate politics.'⁶⁶ As a result a vacuum emerged. The Islamists' notion of 'honesty and morality' of the Muslim ummah and their call for political action to expunge corruption had attractions for certain groups of youths in Bangladesh. The role of the Internet in this context was critical.

These various networks of political Islam were instrumental in making the ummah politically relevant in Bangladesh. The perceived humiliation of Islam angered young Bangladeshi Muslims whose initial awareness of the ummah has been reinforced by the networks and technologies described in this chapter. However, in the twenty-first century, flags and nationally significant monuments are symbols of a Bangladeshi identity that coexists with that of being Muslim. A narrow interpretation of the ummah by Islamists discriminates against fellow Muslim citizens of Bangladesh. Finding a peaceful resolution to this tension between being Bangladeshi and being Muslim challenges millions of people who speak Bengali and follow Islam.

Notes:

(¹) Mumtaz Ahmad. 2008. 'Islam, State, and Society in Bangladesh', in John L. Esposito, John O. Voll, and Osman Bakar (eds), *Asian Islam in the 21st Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 49–79, see p. 75.

(²) Research in this category includes Ali Riaz. 2008. *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Complex Web*. London: Routledge; Ali Riaz and Md. Abu Naser. 2011. 'Islamist Politics and Popular Culture', in Ali Riaz and C. Christine Fair (eds), *Political Islam and Governance in Bangladesh*, New York: Routledge, pp. 115–52; Bertil Lintner. 2003. 'Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation', *Faultlines*, vol. 14. New Delhi: The Institute of Conflict Management; Maneeza Hossain. 2007. *Bangladesh 2007: The New Order and Islamism*. Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute; Maneeza Hossain. 2007. *Broken Pendulum: Bangladesh's Swing to Radicalism*. Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute.

(³) Research in this category includes Aminur Rahim. 2007. 'Communalism and Nationalism in Bangladesh', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 42(6): 551–72; M. Rashiduzzaman. 1997. 'The Dichotomy of Islam and Development: NGOs, Women's Development and Fatawa in Bangladesh', *Contemporary South Asia*, 6(3): 239–46; M. Rashiduzzaman. 1994. 'The Liberals and the Religious Right in Bangladesh', *Asian Survey*, 34(11): 974–90; Tazeen M. Murshid. 1997. 'State, Nation, Identity: The Quest for Legitimacy in Bangladesh', *South Asia*, 20(2): 1–34; Joseph T. O'Connell. 1976. 'Dilemmas of Secularism in Bangladesh', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 11(1–2): 64–81; Joseph T. O'Connell. 2001. 'The Bengali Muslims and the State: Secularism or Humanity for Bangladesh?', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 179–208; Habibul Haque Khondker. 2010. 'The Curious Case of Secularism in Bangladesh: What is the Relevance for The Muslim Majority Democracies?', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 2010, 11(2): 185–201; Emajuddin Ahamed and D.R.J.A. Nazneen. 1990. 'Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?', *Asian Survey*, 30(8): 795–808; Shamsul S.M. Alam. 1993. 'Islam, Ideology and the State of Bangladesh', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 18(1–2): 88–106; Akhand Akhter Hossain. 2012. 'Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh's Culture and Politics: Origins, Dynamics and Implications', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 23(2): 165–98; Maneeza Hossain. 2006. *The Road to a Sharia State? Cultural Radicalization in Bangladesh*. Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute.

(⁴) Research in this category includes Lamia Karim. 2004. 'Democratizing Bangladesh: State, NGOs, and Militant Islam', *Cultural Dynamics*, 16(2–3): 291–318; Maimuna Huq. 2008. 'Reading the Quran in Bangladesh: The Politics of "Belief" among Islamist Women', *Modern Asian Studies*, 42(2–3): 457–88; Elora Shehabuddin. 1999. 'Beware the Bed of Fire: Gender, Democracy, and the Jama'at-i Islami in Bangladesh', *Journal of Women's History*, 10(4): 148–71; Elora Shehabuddin. 2008. 'Jamaat-i-Islam in Bangladesh: Women, Democracy and the

Transformation of Islamist Politics', *Modern Asian Studies*, 42(2-3): 577-603; Santi Rozario. 2006. 'The New Burqa in Bangladesh: Empowerment or Violations of Women's Rights?', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(4): 368-80; Samia Huq. 'Negotiating Islam, Conservatism, Splintered Authority and Empowerment in Urban Bangladesh', *IDS Bulletin*, 41(2): 97-105; Samia Huq. 2011. 'Piety, Music and Gender Transformation: Reconfiguring Women as Culture Bearing Markers of Modernity and Nationalism in Bangladesh', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12(2): 225-39; Samia Huq. 2011. 'Discussing the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Rebellion: Non-Islamist Women and Religious Revival in Urban Bangladesh', *Contemporary Islam*, 5(3): 267-83; Taj ul Islam Hashmi. 1995. 'Women and Islam: Taslima Nasreen, Society and Politics in Bangladesh', *South Asia*, 18(2): 23-48.

(⁵) Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

(⁶) Sohel Parvez. September 5, 2013. 'GDP Swells, Per Capita Income Crosses \$1,000: Statistical Agency Starts Calculations Using 2005-06 As New Base Year.' *The Daily Star*. Dhaka: Bangladesh. Available from <http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/gdp-swells-per-capita-income-crosses-1000/> (accessed on 8/10/2013).

(⁷) Board of Investment Bangladesh, Prime Minister's Office. 2013. Bangladesh at a Glance. Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh. Available from <http://www.boi.gov.bd/index.php/about-bangladesh/bangladesh-at-a-glance#economy> (accessed on 8/10/2013).

(⁸) Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. 'About Bangladesh.' Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh. Available from <http://www.minlaw.gov.bd/aboutbangladesh.htm> (Accessed on 6/10/2013).

(⁹) Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

(¹⁰) Hasan, 'Geopolitics of Political Islam', p. 61.

(¹¹) Hasan, 'Geopolitics of Political Islam', p. 62.

(¹²) Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

(¹³) Anoushi Ehteshami 2005. 'Islam as a Political Force in International Politics', in Nelly Lahoud and Anthony H. Jones (eds), *Islam in World Politics*, pp. 29-53. New York: Routledge; Colin Chapman. 2005. 'Islamic Terrorism: How Should Christians and the West Respond?', *Encounters*, http://sydneyanglicans.net/images/uploads/indepth/Responding_to_IslamicTerror.pdf (accessed on 7 December 2008); Peter Mandaville. 2007. *Global Political Islam*. New York: Routledge; Olivier Roy. 2007. *Secularism Confronts Islam*. Translated by George Holoch. New York: Columbia University Press.

(¹⁴) John L. Esposito (ed.). 1997. *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 4.

(¹⁵) Ehteshami, 'Islam as a Political Force', p. 37; Peter Mandaville. 2001. *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*. London and New York: Routledge.

(¹⁶) Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, p. 276.

(¹⁷) Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.). 2005. *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*. London: Routledge, p. 5.

(¹⁸) Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. 1997. 'Introduction: Religion, States, and Transnational Civil Society', in Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James P. Piscatori (eds), *Transnational Religion and Fading States*. Oxford: Westview Press, pp. 1–24.

(¹⁹) Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, p. 277.

(²⁰) Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, 277; John O. Voll. 1997. 'Relations among Islamist Groups', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 231–247.

(²¹) Peggy Levitt. 2001. 'Between God, Ethnicity, and Country: An Approach to the Study of Transnational Religion'. Paper presented at the workshop on Transnational Migration: Comparative Perspectives, Princeton University, Princeton, available online at <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/Levitt.pdf> (accessed on 28 July 2009).

(²²) Abdullah al-Ahsan. 1992. *Ummah or Nation? Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society*. London: The Islamic Foundation.

(²³) Robert A. Saunders. 2008. 'The Ummah as Nation: A Reappraisal in the Wake of the "Cartoons Affair"', *Nations and Nationalism*, 14(2): 303–21, see p. 306.

(²⁴) Mubashar Hasan. 2011. 'The Concept of Globalization and How This Has Impacted on Contemporary Muslim Understanding of Ummah', *Journal of Globalization Studies*, 2(2): 145–59.

(²⁵) Hasan, 'Concept of Globalization', p. 149.

(²⁶) Hasan, 'Concept of Globalization', p. 147.

(²⁷) Samiul Hasan (ed.). 2012. *The Muslim World in the 21st Century: Space, Power, and Human Development*. Dordrecht: Springer.

(²⁸) Yvonne Y. Haddad. 1983. 'Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 67-98, see p. 71.

(²⁹) Mubashar Hasan. 2011. 'Democracy and Political Islam in Bangladesh', *South Asia Research*, 31(2): 97-117, see p. 101.

(³⁰) Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury. 2008. 'Unmasked Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh', *California Chronicle*, 21 September, available online at <http://www.interfaithstrength.com/images/Unmasked.htm> (accessed on 23/04/2013).

(³¹) Mubashar Hasan. 2012. 'Historical Developments of Political Islam with Reference to Bangladesh', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 47(2): 155-67.

(³²) Hasan, 'Historical Developments', p. 163.

(³³) Hasan, 'Historical Developments', p. 163.

(³⁴) Muslim Brotherhood. February 8, 2013. 'Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Unjust Trials for Leaders of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami'. *Ikhwanweb (Muslim Brotherhood's Official Website)*. Available from <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=30637> (Accessed on 26/03/2013)

(³⁵) Bangladesh Independent News Network. November 17, 2012. 'Conference of 150 Country Delegates in Sudan: STOP injustice on Islamists of Bangladesh'. Available on <http://bdinn.com/news/conference-of-150-country-delegates-in-sudan-stop-injustice-on-islamists-of-bangladesh/> (accessed on 09/06/2013)

(³⁶) Bangladesh Independent News Network. November 17, 2012. 'Conference of 150 Country Delegates in Sudan'.

(³⁷) Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*; Ahmad, 'Islam, State, and Society'.

(³⁸) Ahmed Muinuddin Khan. 2006. 'Faraizi Movement', *Banglapedia: Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, available online at www.banglapedia.org (accessed on 13 September 2009).

(³⁹) Mohammad Shah. 2001. 'The Bengal Muslims and the World of Islam: Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial Bengal as Reflected in the Press', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims*, pp. 71-86. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

(⁴⁰) Ahmad, 'Islam, State, and Society', p. 68.

(⁴¹) Hasan, 'Democracy and Political Islam'.

(⁴²) Hasan, 'Democracy and Political Islam', p. 101.

(⁴³) Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*, p. 82.

(⁴⁴) Nasim Banu. 2006. 'Islami University', *Banglapedia: Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, available online at www.banglapedia.org (accessed on 14 July 2009).

(⁴⁵) Voll, 'Relations among Islamist Groups', p. 236.

(⁴⁶) See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Azhar_University

(⁴⁷) Voll, 'Relations among Islamist Groups', p. 236.

(⁴⁸) Voll, 'Relations among Islamist Groups', p. 236.

(⁴⁹) Ahmad, 'Islam, State, and Society', p. 64.

(⁵⁰) Ahmad, 'Islam, State, and Society', p. 67.

(⁵¹) Ahmad, 'Islam, State, and Society', p. 67.

(⁵²) The *Muslim Observer* claims to be an alternative to corporate media and to focus on issues of Islam and Muslims. See http://muslimmedianetwork.com/mmn/?page_id=2

(⁵³) Mubashar Hasan. 2012. 'The Geopolitics of Political Islam in Bangladesh', *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, 14 (1-2): 60-9, see p. 68.

(⁵⁴) Parag Khanna. 2008. *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*. New York: Random House, p. 238.

(⁵⁵) Ahamed and Nazneen, 'Islam in Bangladesh', p. 806.

(⁵⁶) Hasan, 'Historical Developments'.

(⁵⁷) Rudolph, 'Introduction', p. 4.

(⁵⁸) *Times of India*. March 30, 2007. 'Six JMB Militants Executed in Bangladesh.' Available from http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-03-30/rest-of-world/27884847_1_jmb-militants-siddiqui-islam-president-iajuddin-ahmed (Accessed on 24/09/2012)

(⁵⁹) Roy Jackson. 2007. *Nietzsche and Islam*. London: Routledge, p. 20.

(⁶⁰) Mohammad Sadiq. 1991. 'The Turkish Revolution and the Abolition of the Caliphate', *International Studies*, 28(1): 25-40.

(⁶¹) Lauren Langman. 2005. 'The Dialectic of Unenlightenment: Toward a Critical Theory of Islamic Fundamentalism', *Critical Sociology*, 31(1-2): 243-79.

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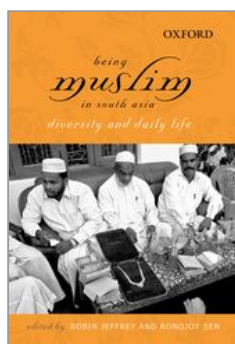
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Muslim Aspirations in Bangladesh

Looking Back and Redrawing Boundaries

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Abstract and Keywords

Till 2013, political discourses in Bangladesh offered Muslims very little space other than one of two polar opposites: the ultra secular liberals or the anti-1971 and thus anti-nationalist Islamists. As Islam presented itself through new adaptations to modern life, the polarization between the two camps widened as citizens who desired Islam as one of the key anchors of their identity were left devoid of possibilities, often turning to the Islamist or versions of the Islamist rhetoric. With a particular kind of textual Islam increasingly claiming the grounds, one often bemoaned the absence of an in-between space from where Bangladeshis could claim tolerance, pluralism and spirituality in the creation of a democratic society. This was also reflected in the aspirations of men and women who found themselves, often by default, engaging with a religious rhetoric that premised itself in an opposition to secularism. This article points to some articulations and debates of such aspirations by women who congregate to read and discuss the Koran in Dhaka.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Islamist, secular, identity conflict, nation state, pluralism, Allama Abul Hashim, democracy

Polarized Spaces and Fitting In

‘Surely, even in the time of the prophet, not everyone excelled in piety.... Piety has its ebbs and flows. But what was remarkable about the Prophet’s message and the golden era of the Islamic civilization was that Muslims were creative,

innovative, and productive. We feel that it is this message that needs to be sent clearly.'

Above is Nafisa's statement, a young female university student from Dhaka, who is an active organizer of an Islamic study circle in which I carried out research. Pious in her outward disposition such as *salat* and hijab, and inwardly God-conscious, Nafisa brings a certain Islam to the fore that is both youthful and intense. The youthfulness of her **(p.250)** Islam manifests in her zeal to create a new Bangladesh, to think creatively, and not to be bogged down by old habits and attachments. Her intensity comes from her commitment to the pillars of Islam, and her conviction that her nationalism must be framed by such a commitment. It is with these dual attachments—to Islam and nation—that she organizes her life, critiques existing institutions, and aspires to bringing changes in her personal life and the larger society. But what is this Islam?

Nafisa's Islam, I argue, is an evolving one. One that is in a constant state of aspiration rather than a definitive end point, it has its beginnings in the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the leading Islamist party to which many of her older family members belonged. Religion and politics equally undergirding her affinities, Nafisa's natural destination seemed to have been the Islami Chhatra Shangstha—the girls' wing of the JI. However, very soon after joining the Shangstha's discussion groups, Nafisa grew disenchanted with her ability to pose critical questions. She felt strongly that the Shangstha did not offer her the platform she needed to cultivate personal piety, simultaneously taking that piety to the outer world. Neither the Islamist world, nor the secular one offered her the stage she needed to feel and act as a Bangladeshi Muslim. Thus, she began her own platform which brought together young, educated men and women from Dhaka, to learn about Islam and take that learning to bring about change in their communities.

In this chapter, I describe three of these platforms that contain groups seeking an 'alternative' way to being Muslim in Bangladesh, away from the dominant Islamist as well as the 'secular' platforms. I explore some contours of certain debates that animate the longing towards a 'new' Muslim Bengali identity. Such longing leads me to revisit the work of a controversial and thus less spoken of politician, thinker, and writer of the 1930s-60s generation: Allama Abul Hashim who also sought ways to deal with tensions around being Muslim, Bengali, and forward-thinking half a century ago. In examining today's longing, and at the same time examining the attempts made 50 years ago to resolve dilemmas around Muslim-ness and plurality, the chapter both enhances our understanding of the intellectual history of 'Bangladesh' and suggests ways to deal with these tensions, as Islam remains the majority and 'state' religion, while living alongside other religions both within the country as well as the region of South Asia.

(p.251) That neither the Islamist platform nor the secular platform offers ideal elements with which to enact a Muslim Bangladeshi subjectivity is a theme I heard repeatedly in the Quranic discussion circles I studied in Dhaka.¹ The distance felt from the secular platform has to do, to a great extent, with the construction of this platform after the war of liberation in 1971—anchored in Bengali language and culture. In this construction, a consideration of Bengalis' Muslim past was sidelined in favour of a more 'religiously neutral' Bengali identity. However, the sole dependence on language and culture as the binding force irked Muslims, and critics of secularism saw in it Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's alleged affinity with India.² Thus, tensions around secularism's ability to deliver on its promise had to be gauged through mass acceptance and reactions. Consequently, even Mujib began to act, as staunch secular critics argue, in conceding ways. A reading of secularism as anti-religion began to be countered by Mujib himself, who argued that secularism be translated and understood as *dharmaniropekkhota*, which literally means neutrality towards all religions. Mujib said: 'Secularism does not mean the absence of religion. You are a Mussalman, you perform your religious rites. The Hindu, the Christian, the Buddhists all will freely perform their religious rights. There is no irreligiousness on the soil of Bangladesh, but there is secularism.'³

If all religions were indeed to coexist without prejudice and on their own terms, what would those terms be? And who would decide on how to read, interpret, practise, and preach religion in ways that promote visions of equality of and tolerance between all **(p.252)** religions?⁴ The absence of an ideological argument or philosophical rationale saw the emergence of very little thinking on how Muslims as a majority would continue to engage with Islam and simultaneously create a secular polity. While negative reactions at home and required geopolitical affinities⁵ such as strategic ties with China and the United States, as well as the Gulf states, led Mujib to resort to Islamic symbols, they came a little too late. Amidst mass dissatisfaction with governance, national development, and the turn to one-party rule, Mujib and most of his family members were assassinated in 1975. While recent thinking and publications such as the autobiography of Mujib reveal his commitment to a nationalism that would recognize and empower Muslims, his era is remembered as one where the issue of religion, especially that of the majority population, was inadequately factored into discussions of national identity.

Subsequent regimes co-opted Islam in several ways, amongst which the key was the lifting of the ban on JI, which allowed religion, or rather a particular brand of Islam, back into the public, political space. General Ziaur Rahman removed the word 'secularism' from the **(p.253)** constitution and heralded a new brand of nationalism—Bangladeshi nationalism—different from Mujib and Awami League's Bengali nationalism. The latter allegedly drew too much inspiration from West Bengal as a way of underscoring its Bengali-ness and thereby failed to represent the ethos of the Muslim majority. While Bangladeshi nationalism

appealed many who found in Bengali nationalism a subservience to India,⁶ it accommodated the JI, many of whose leaders served as members of Razakar, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams⁷ to oppress and subvert the movement and war for Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi nationalism held the potential to articulate a new nationalist identity that factored in the sentiments of the Muslim majority, while holding on to the principles of equality and justice. However, their links with the JI diminished the nationalist appeal of the party, in spite of the fact that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) consists of many freedom fighters. Thus, for many, Bangladeshi nationalism, regardless of its potential to speak to the Muslim majority, never quite earned freedom from the stigma of an inadequate and flawed nationalism. The fate of Bangladeshi nationalism appeared the most troubled in 2013, as the demand for the trial of war criminals (all but two of those charged were top-ranking JI leaders) escalated into a popular movement with the BNP ill-articulating its position and failing to jettison the JI. With the trial of the war criminals, Bengali nationalism, and the secularism that lies in its shadow, made a comeback. What that would mean for Islam forming the subjectivity of the Bangladeshi remained to be seen. However, what was undeniable was a polarized terrain divided between Bengali nationalism that was yet to factor in religion in a coherent manner, and Bangladeshi nationalism which had given the field to Islamists to construct what it means to be a Muslim in Bangladesh. Amidst this polarization, many Bangladeshis, espousing a strong desire to be apolitical, but engage with religion, have not found a strong enough platform from which to do so.

(p.254) A polarized terrain, with no in-between platform had several consequences. First, the Islamists, being the dominant group bringing Islam into the public space, enjoyed political support at home and from abroad in determining how one should engage with Islam. Other groups who remained active were the non-political Tablighi Jamaat, as well as the old Sufi *tariqas* with their *pirs* and *mazars*. However, this latter group—less organized and financially able—were not able to establish a strong enough counter-message.⁸ Especially amongst the urban-educated, a tangible Islam that one could read, understand, and discuss—and an Islamist rhetoric which trumped Sufi practices of following a *pir*—gained ground.⁹ The modern, educated Bangladeshi's orientation to Islam is characterized by reading sermons, watching them on television and hearing them on CDs, and discussing and debating. While such an orientation resembles the Islamist's modern approach¹⁰ to understanding and enacting religiosity in the private and public spheres, not all who adhere to this approach are politically active or aspire for state power.

This is what I found in the Quranic discussion circles in Dhaka. These groups, referred to as 'Quran class', 'Islam class', '*da'wah* (p.255) group', '*tafseer* class', '*ta'lim*', and '*mojlish*' consist of educated women from the middle to upper

middle classes. Their ages range from 15 to 60. For many, attending these sessions and engaging with religious texts and discussions is a natural extension of their existing religious orientation. For others, it is a completely new practice that marks a new identity altogether, sharply contrasted against the 'secular', 'modern' ways of their past. In these groups there are distinct overlaps with Islamist methodologies of cultivating a public piety, but, at the same time, the groups refrain from, or even explicitly disavow, the Islamist aspirations about achieving state power. The groups also do not engage in the consequent political manoeuvrings. Thus, while they adhere to texts, and are urged to scripturally authenticate and disseminate Islam while inculcating a pious disposition, they also question some of the absolutes that the modes of reading and practice presented them with. In other words, the religious discussion circles veer simultaneously towards fixity, while showing glimpses of change in the discourses that were central to the groups' projects.

In the following section, I demonstrate ideas around Muslim/non-Muslim relations and the contestations that characterize the swing between fixity and change. The ethnographic examples not only highlight the debates and nature of the dissent, but also point at the potential for growth and change. Given the contested yet very real nature of this potential, I feel several things are important. First, one must look to see how others are framing Islam—and the members of the discussion circles did this when they read, blogged, and watched sermons and discussions taking place in other parts of the world. However, it is equally important to look back into history to see how Islam has been presented in Bengal in the past. I undertake such a revisiting by resuscitating the work of Allama Abul Hashim who was an important figure in Bengali Muslim League politics until the 1940s. However, in the 1950s and 1960s he became less active in politics and devoted more of his time to thinking and writing about being Bengali and Muslim in the newly born and evolving nation state of Pakistan. A focus on Hashim's work allows us to understand a particular strand of Bengali Muslim history that espoused an interpretive framework where the conceptions of Muslim/self, non-Muslim/other spoke to interfaith relations in a non-communal **(p.256)** manner—an important political mandate for modernizing Pakistan and the Bengalis who partly constituted it. I analyse Hashim's approach not to propose it as a corrective or the only way forward, but rather highlight a discourse that was relevant for Bengalis in the region. But before exploring Hashim's work, I present examples of some of the debates from the Islamic or Quranic discussion circles to which I referred earlier.

Thinking about the 'Other'

While the rhetoric in religious discussion circles clearly demarcates those who strive towards piety from those who do not, there are also those voices, such as the one I began this chapter with, for whom the need for a just society supersedes the personal struggles for piety. The fractures marking the

continuum between personal piety and just society reflect a complex understanding of many issues, including conceptualizations of the other. Women relate to the category 'other'—people of other faiths—through the conflicting registers of distance, sharing, and learning, and if possible, converting. One of the key points of emphasis in these discussion circles is that Muslim pious aspirants and productive Muslim societies need to be absolutely focused on their resolve and objectives so that no other ways can exert any influence on them. In that, women are repeatedly urged to mark their territory and guard it carefully. With such intent, the women from the discussion circles feel that it is best to keep similar kinds of company. Often, this decision leaves out many good friends and family members who have not undergone a similar religious transformation. In keeping old ties alive, women are urged to behave in a manner such that friends will be inquisitive and encouraged to take to religion in a new and invigorated manner.

The efforts towards influencing serve the dual purpose of consolidating within oneself the knowledge that Islam is *the* religion to be followed, as well as letting others know of Islam's supremacy and goodness. Yoginder Sikand writes of the missionary zeal of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, who said of non-Muslims: 'Even if they were not to convert to Islam, the work of da'wa would cause their hearts to be softened. Enemies need to be converted into friends, Islam insists, and just as the Prophet returned good for evil, Muslims must seek to **(p.257)** impress others with their character and teachings of Islam, instead of alienating them through conflict.'¹¹ The women in the discussion circles repeatedly talked about how Christians have spread their religion, and that Muslims too must always treat others with kindness and espouse a similar missionary zeal not only because Islam demands that of them, but also to impress and change others.

That others should change is an important point that refracts conceptualizations of Muslim/self, non-Muslim/other in the discussion circles. The rhetoric is that others should change and adopt Islam, if they are to realize their true potential in this world and the next. This rhetoric stems from the interpretive framework used by the discussion circles that sanctions particular conceptualizations of Islam, the Quran, the Hadith, and the way reason is constructed in relation to these foundational texts of Islam. For the women in the discussion circles, Islam is a regeneration of earlier revealed religions—beginning from Abraham, all the way down to Jesus Christ before the arrival of Prophet Muhammad. If each prophet only restored and renewed faith, Islam then begins with Abraham and ends with Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the inclusiveness of Islam is circumscribed by its finality with Muhammad. Those that do not fall within this Abrahamic tradition, and those that do but do not subscribe to the new teachings that have been added onto the tradition by Prophet Muhammad, constitute the 'other'. These 'others' are considered to be deniers of the truth—kafirs—for whom God has reserved the worst kinds of punishment. No wonder that women from the discussion circles absolutely insist upon conversion when

family members want to marry people of other faiths. In contrast, the Muslim is the believer whose faith opens up a world of possibilities from which to accrue rewards. Thus, the Muslim/self is at an advantage by virtue of his or her faith in the entire continuum—from Abraham to Muhammad. All one has to do is deploy his faith and act upon one's will to commit good deeds. As one woman said:

Aqida [belief] is everything. It can save you or destroy you. Even if you falter in doing the right things sometimes, there is hope ... because when you have the correct faith, there is always hope. But if your faith is not **(p. 258)** right, whatever you do, however well meaning, will not come from and therefore cannot be directed at God. Ultimately, you may serve humanity in some limited way, this service can't reach God, and to serve God is man's ultimate purpose.

The notion of a correct faith stems from the understanding that the Quran is the literal word of God: His last testimony revealing the last, most refined, and therefore the best plan for mankind. The Quran is considered to be applicable for all men at all times, and the Hadith—divinely preserved—is to be read with almost equal value. In order to honour the sanctity and the veracity of Islam's message, it is therefore very important to stay within the limits of the Quran and the Hadith, by not dissenting, refuting, or changing anything. The relevance of the Quran must not be questioned and its applicability must be advocated by understanding the logic laid out in the Quran itself, matched by examples left by the Prophet in the form of the Hadith and Sunnah. The paramount importance of the Hadith literature was highlighted by a preacher from one of the discussion circles when she said:

The importance of following Muhammad is laid out by Allah himself, when he says in the Quran that if you love me (Allah) follow my *rasul*. If you believe that the Quran doesn't lie, you have to believe that Allah has protected the Hadith too, so that we may know how to follow the Prophet and thus obey Allah. If God hadn't protected the Hadith, how would His proclamation and command in the Quran be true?

Using the Hadith as a definitive route through which to find and obey God thus places the Hadith almost at par with the Quran. The role of reason is to subscribe to the set limits and to understand the logic that keeps the limits and the narrative alive. Preachers from the discussion circles argue that they are not *mufassirin*—those trained enough in the science of interpretation and jurisprudence to interpret the Quran themselves. The rhetoric of reading and understanding for oneself which draws many women to the discussion circles, through its separation from 'traditional' practices of understanding Islam through attachments with the family or a *pir*, is therefore heavily indebted to the

world of Islamic scholars who decide what the limits of the interpretive framework must be.

(p.259) The rhetoric in the discussion circles is formed around this interpretive framework in which the Quran is sovereign, with the Hadith holding almost equal importance. There are clear objectives and processes that promise clear outcomes, and in pursuit of these, women are asked to submit their hearts and minds and tutor their senses to understand their inherent logic. However, the ‘clarity’ that endows the rhetoric with a particular certainty does not go without questioning. As Bangladesh struggles with constitutional and political manoeuvring of secularism, the ‘other’ question becomes an important one—at least for those who believe their piety must lead to a productive society. While the majority resonate views I have already discussed—that non-Muslims should be held accountable for their ‘partial faith’, that they ‘simply don’t run in the same race’, or a more extreme view whereby ‘they should just pay a *jiziya*, and live like *dhimmis*’—for certain other women these are no longer good enough explanations.

The following is a snippet from an argument that broke out on Facebook between several discussion circle participants regarding an article about an Islamic project in Indonesia that aims to ‘save’ poor Indonesian Muslim women from conversion to Christianity at the hands of Christian missionaries. One young woman put up an article on her Facebook page where a progressive Indonesian ulama discussed the erroneous numbers and the unrealistic options the project bases itself on. The debate that broke out had more women siding with the project, arguing that the task of saving Muslims from the hands of Christian missionaries was important, and that the particular ulama who was critical of the project had neither his numbers nor his *aqida* right. To this a smaller number of women disagreed, arguing that the issue was not about numbers but the spirit in which the project aims to ‘save’ Muslims from conversion. One woman wrote:

The logic used by far right campaigners in Europe is that Islamization of Europe is happening and that society should wake up and do something about it. It is this paradigm that has resulted in the ban on the veil in France and minarets in Switzerland. This group raises the war cry that the demographic in Europe is increasingly becoming ‘Moslem’ (not factual by the way), and unless society wakes up, their children will be lost to the Mullahs! For obvious reasons, we find this paradigm racist—Islamophobic. The Indonesian project does exactly that—only the roles are reversed. We raise the war cry that the Christians are coming—as if **(p.260)** this, in any way, raises multi-faith harmony! The reason to spread Islam is not that the Christians are coming. Rasul Allah’s life is an example of how he made Islam attractive—not a mud-slinging competition between two religions to grab the highest numbers of followers. Being a Muslim doesn’t mean

thinking of Christians as threats. It means thinking of them as brothers in humanity. Surely, the reason to spread Islam is because we love our brothers in other religions and want them to enjoy all rewards in the hereafter, and not because we want to win the race to 'largest religion in the world!'

The above statement strives for several ideals. First, it aims to see people of other faith as brethren whose lives and decisions are to be understood in the spirit of a shared humanity and not competition. In this, there is a plea for greater inclusiveness than espoused by an alarmist approach where people of other faiths are considered to be adversaries, thereby warranting resistance and change on the others' part. This softer and more inclusive approach, though deterring 'war cries' and 'racism', paradoxically substantiates multifaith harmony ultimately with un-coerced conversion. The difference between such conversion and the one the narrator is protesting against is of a degree between option and compulsion. Perhaps, it is 'option' that gives other religionists the capacity to remain as they are, the acceptance of which allows Muslims to uphold multifaith harmony. Most women from the discussion circles like the softer approach. They agree in principle that everyone has an option to change or remain as they are. However, they are uncomfortable at the thought that others should remain non-Muslims. After all, they wonder: 'Isn't it better for them, and for the society that everyone's deeds be driven by the same *aqida*? If we are to leave them as they are, what about the noble task of spreading Islam? What about our brothers in humanity? Do we not want *jannah* [paradise] for them?'

These are some of the conundrums shared by the women as they try to ascertain their role as pious Muslims in creating a productive society. How do they envision and create a balance between the euphoria they feel about their own religion and the consequent constructions of the self as Muslim, working towards changing society for the better and multifaith harmony? What are some elements of thinking about the self that may help think about the other in a way that urges them to strike that balance? It is evident that the women are struggling and **(p.261)** trying to move away from 'war cries', seeing the other as opponents to be defeated and the self as supreme conqueror. However, as things stood, they were not yet able to articulate a position where the self/other balance sat easily within a coherent paradigm. What could a possible paradigm be? And what would that mean for the interpretive or hermeneutic framework that the women subscribe to now, where both the Quran and Hadith are sovereign, where parameters are set within which one enacts their Muslim-ness, and where critiquing those parameters rests with a coterie of scholars whose interpretive reasoning the women hesitate to refute? For a direction towards some answers, I explore the work of Allama Abul Hashim, who framed his

approach in the context of Pakistan—with a priority on being a non-communal Bengali Muslim.

Looking Back—Redrawing Boundaries

Allama Abul Hashim is best known for his role in Muslim League politics, notably his efforts to prevent the break-up of Bengal in 1946. Inspired by his teacher Maulana Azad Subhani, Hashim believed in the universality of Islamic principles and their promise in resolving the various tensions that Muslims in India were faced with. Even as partition became inevitable, Hashim remained unconvinced of the tenacity of communalism as a basis of nation formation. However, his United Bengal movement failed to secure the final approval by Nehru and Sardar Patel. Hashim did not take to this setback well and lost both his political edge as well as his eyesight. He returned to Dhaka in the early 1950s and lent support to two Islamic organizations: the first is Tamaddune Majlis, which was a cultural organization, and then the short-lived political party Khilafat-e-Rabbani. He dedicated the 1950s and 1960s to writing extensively on Islam and its political and cultural relevance in meeting the demands of the day. He took charge of the Islamic Academy from its inception in 1961 and served as its director until the war of independence in 1971.

For Hashim, the question of the other was intimately tied to the construction of the self. The Muslim self came into being through understanding of two key concepts—‘*rabbaniyat*’ and ‘*khilafat*’—on elaborations of which Hashim’s fame rested. These concepts are to be understood as an extension of God, revealing his names through **(p.262)** which He makes ‘divine attributes’ known to man. Hashim pinpointed the most important attribute of God, reflected through His name, ‘Al-Rab’.¹² The implication of God being the creator and sustainer before all else is that man’s job on earth is to oversee the sustenance and evolution of creation. Hashim continued: ‘Free gifts of Allah are universal. Here, Allah does not make any discrimination between the good and the bad, the virtuous and the vicious and believers and rejecters of faith.’¹³ This and other characteristics of ‘Rabbaniyat are the contents of the divine attribute Al-rahman’, the attribute by which God’s justice is one of mercy. It is only by drawing from and emulating ‘Allah’s *sifat* or attribute of *rabbaniyat*’ that man can truly become a Khalifa or vicegerent of God in this world. Hashim added: ‘The will of God made manifest in His Creation’ is the primary source of Islam. In other words, to know and live Islam, one has to act as the ‘*vice-regent of Rabbaniyat*’¹⁴ charged with the responsibility of sustaining his own self and other creatures around him faithfully according to the principles of mercy. Faithful performance of this sublime duty is the true *ibadat* or slavery and this is the meaning and significance of Islam which connotes unqualified submission to the will of Allah. Greatness of man, either as an individual or a nation, depends of how he behaves.’¹⁵

Hashim's twin thesis on *rabbaniyat* and *khilafat* leads to his discussion of '*huqqul-ibad*' or rights of the slaves of Allah, where both ritualistic forms of worship, such as prayers and fasting directed at God, as well as man's duties towards society, are really for one's own benefit as God is unaffected by these. Placing God on a higher plane—unaffected by man's actions—and with ritualistic worship meaningful only in relation to service to humanity, Hashim argued that serving others was of primary importance to ensure that ownership and redistribution of wealth did not end in 'absolute right' for individuals or society. To that end, Hashim critiqued the excesses caused by private ownership of property. Such ideas led his critics, mostly from other religious quarters, to accuse him of communist/socialist leanings. While Hashim (p.263) was close to several communist leaders, and even sought the assistance of one to draft the sections on secularism and equality for men and women in the Bengal Muslim League manifesto, later in life, he grew equally critical of socialism. He wrote: 'Socialism is social ownership of wealth as distinct from and opposed to individual ownership. A nation is but an individual in the community of nations. Socialism, therefore, is individualism writ large and contains within its womb all the ills of individualism in colossal proportions.'¹⁶ Neither to the right, nor to the left (at least in the sense espoused by the communist/socialist leftists), Hashim's deployment of Islam was aimed at constantly using critical reasoning to carve out a 'middle path' towards equality and justice.

This critical positioning is reflected in his discussion of 'Sura Fatiha', the first chapter of the Quran, where a discussion of *shirk* (partnership with God) and *kufr* (denial of God)—both usually deployed to characterize the 'other' (non-Muslims)—were linked by Hashim, primarily to one's inner state. He described *shirk* as 'a grave illness that draws man blindingly to only the apparent and the superficial, preventing him from seeing beneath the surface'. Hashim clearly wrote that *shirk* is not the worship of idols, as even a clever idol-worshipping Hindu would say that forms worshipped are mere representations of the immanent God whom they, in reality, worship. Thus, to worship the personal desires that go beyond the limits set by *rabbaniyat* and service to humanity constituted *shirk* in Hashim's interpretive framework. While he did label a belief in a tripartite understanding of God, that is, the trinity, as constitutive of *shirk* and the denial of God, Hashim's definition of trinity was not the father, son, and the Holy Ghost, as understood by Catholics, but 'the ills of desire, such as power (*shokti*), wealth (*shompod*) and lust (*kaam*)'.¹⁷ Hashim's Quranic exegesis absolved people of other religions of 'sinful distance' and brought the focus back to the self, whereby any human being, through uncontrolled material desires and ill-directed use of power can deny God. Within such a framework, Hashim argued that the Quran itself, in the chapter titled 'The Fig', gives evidence that Buddha was indeed a prophet of God. He wrote:

(p.264) As the concrete proof of nobility of human nature and its potentiality, the Holy Quran cites as living examples the four specimens of perfect humanity: Buddha, Jesus, Moses and Muhammad (peace be upon him) by means of the four symbols, the fig, the olive, the Mount Sinai and Mecca.... The Muslim commentators are disinclined to and shy of accepting Gautama Buddha as a Prophet. They argue that non-semitic prophets are not specifically mentioned in the Quran. They forget that there is no room for prejudice or conceit in Islam. Historically the Fig is definitively the symbol of Buddha; He attained nirvana under a Fig tree.¹⁸

Hashim further argued that dissimilarities between certain contemporary Buddhist beliefs and practices and the fundamental teachings of Islam should not be seen as a negation of Buddha's lack of divine inspiration. Rather, Buddhism today, like many other faiths, has become distorted just the way Muslims have in the past corrupted Islam, and may do so again in the future, if they fail to live by the ideals of *rabbaniyat*, *khilafat*, and *huqqul-ibad*.

If a self-proclaimed Muslim is to be a believer, he must imbibe the constitutive characteristics of *rabbaniyat*—mercy and compassion and equal treatment for all, along with constant, critical reflection about sources and structures of power. Such a person must read and understand the canonical texts of Islam accordingly. If one is to learn through constant questioning and critiquing of the structures of power, how does one set the parameters within which one feels and acts as a Muslim? Where is the status of the Quran, the Islamic tradition, and the relationship of reason to these?

Hashim believed the Quran to be a holy text, a continuation of earlier divinely revealed texts. He wrote:

The Holy Quran contains the fundamentals of the law of Nature which governs man—secrets of nature revealed to man which human intellect and effort cannot independently discover.... An intelligent study of the Holy Quran would lead to discoveries of the secrets of nature, and reciprocally the study of nature will help the proper interpretation and understanding of the Holy Quran.... As human knowledge increases the Holy Quran unfolds itself gradually like the petals of a flower. No individual but the accumulated knowledge of man and the voice of the age **(p.265)** expressed through some select individuals correctly interprets the Holy Quran, just as the spirit of the age expresses itself through some epoch making philosophers or scientists.¹⁹

While the understanding of the Quran requires accumulated knowledge and interpretation, skills akin to that of philosophers and scientists, its reading must be rational, in accordance with the needs of the present, without compromising on the essential teachings the text carries. Hashim wrote:

The method of studying the Quran must be revolutionalized.... Each verse must be read with reference to its context and verses immediately preceding and following it without losing significance of its sequence with its following and preceding verses.... The Holy Quran should be studied with blunt and plain meaning of the words without attempting to find mystery everywhere, having, however, due regard to similes, metaphors, allegories and imaginaries.²⁰

While the Quran is very much a holy text for Hashim, he oriented Muslims to the goal that its reading be systematic and dynamic. He argued that the text of the Quran came upon mankind at a particular stage of man's cultural and intellectual development. This framework thus posits the imperfection of man, rather than the limits of the text. The logical extension of this idea then, for Hashim, was to bear in mind that much of what the Quran says should be understood as literally applicable only to the evolving intellectual and consequently cultural, economic, and political stages the Arabs occupied at the time. Hashim argued that the Quran underlies certain fundamental norms. In the spirit of keeping up with intellectual evolution, Hashim then prescribed *ijtihad* as a way of making sense of and constructing meaning in present day cultural, political, and economic contexts.

Thus, Hashim's clear call for a dynamic and invigorated reading of the texts where the meaning of words and verses are fluid and amenable to new and changing interpretations does not belittle the status of the Quran as divinely revealed and useful in the present time. What **(p.266)** his frameworks calls for is a tutoring of man's intellect in accordance with certain principles that are considered hallmarks of modernity in grasping the fundamental message of the Quran.

The (re)tutoring of intellectual capacities in line with the demands of modernity can be understood through Hashim's position on the Hadith literature, which he argued must also be re-examined. Hashim wrote that it is not sufficient to know particular statements uttered by Prophet Muhammad. Rather, one has to understand the contexts, principles, and the inductive logic by which he arrived at certain statements. If the value of the Hadith lies beyond mere utterances, Hashim argued that the rigours of modern scientific inquiry into history, absent before Ibn Khaldun, renders the veracity of even the most authentic Hadith suspect. In addition, Hashim's critical evaluation of the history of the ever-expanding state and territory through Islam, in conjunction with the corruption that had crept into the caliphate and its patronization of the clergy, should give pause for a re-evaluation of the Hadith literature.²¹ He argued that certain statements of Prophet Muhammad such as those mentioned in his last hajj have a universal import. Other Hadith are deemed relevant to their particular contexts. However, Hashim did not call for a wholesale rejection of these.

Rather, he argued that they must be reconsidered in light of Quran's primary messages and applied accordingly.

Thus, Hashim did not make a complete secularist leap rendering the Quran a mere historical text, devoid of allegory and simile, and the Hadith tradition corrupt and redundant. Rather, he took an idealist approach,²² retaining the primacy as well as the divinity and esoteric nature of the Quran, and the Hadith to be read only as they convey the essential meaning of the Quran. Hashim did not therefore disassociate himself from the Islamic tradition. In fact, he remained very much attached to it through his focus on relevant yet spiritual engagement as well as his belief that in order to interpret and spread Islam, one **(p.267)** has to understand the ontological status of its sources, the historical trajectories they have traversed, the different forces of power that have led to particular formations at different times, along with how the lessons learnt may deliver justice in the present time. Such an orientation then allows Hashim to innovate through a combination of critical reason and the use of similitudes as exemplified in the Quran, and prioritize the needs of the day. The reason for my elaborating on the thinking of Abul Hashim and the women's discussion groups in the same breath comes with a suggestive tone that allows for the former's hermeneutic approach that foregrounds a critical appraisal of power to illuminate and provide some direction to some of the dilemmas that plague the latter. Perhaps Hashim's insistence on critical thinking through relations and forces of power to reflect on man's ability to imbibe God's attributes and live as God's vicegerent will be instructive for women in the discussion circle to think about the interpretive approach that guides them, the forces of power that frame it, what it delivers and forecloses, and consequently, what alternative permutations may render Muslim thoughts and actions more tolerant today.

Abul Hashim's approach, with its focus on *ijtihad*, subjecting the Hadith literature to the rigours of modern historical methods, and understanding that the sovereignty of the Quran has a historical and temporal contingency, was one that allowed him and those he spoke to, to envision a particular way of being Muslim at critical moment for the Bengali Muslims. His position on other religions, where he traced prophecy beyond the Semitic line and argued that God sent prophets to other places also (such as the Indian subcontinent), was an inclusive one, where sin and denial are ultimately about one's own spiritual loss. Such introspective reflection is perhaps in line with a concern against communalism that plagued many in Hashim's generation. For many, Hashim's credibility is tainted by the fact that he served under Ayub Khan's dictatorship. However, the particular interpretive framework he espoused, where a critical reflection on power is foregrounded before any parameters of action are set, allowed him to critique the Pakistani state's hegemony over Bengalis. Thus, in spite of serving under Ayub, he was able to give official statements condemning

the **(p.268)** Pakistani administration's attempts at writing Bengali in the Urdu script. He was equally critical of bans imposed on the music and other work of Rabindranath Tagore. Being Muslim and Bengali, and living with people of other faiths, as Bengalis have done for centuries, were possibilities more easily facilitated by an interpretive approach that professed 'faith as an outcome of critical inquiry rather than as a precondition for it'.²³

I use Hashim's example here to draw attention to an interpretive approach that can provide relief to some of the discomfort experienced by women from the discussion circles who want to take up Islam peacefully and for positive change, but wonder whether thinking of people of other faiths as opponents to be defeated reflects that positivity. The hermeneutic approach that brings theses women to a particular kind of Islam is different in its handling of the Quran and the Hadith. This approach, indebted to modern education and other technologies of modernity, has arrived in Bangladesh through various channels of power. While it lends a certain appeal to women who wish to live as modern Muslims, the women also need to question the basis of the discourse and to assess the possibilities that are both opened and closed by it. To assume that women will just choose another interpretive framework is simplistic. However, given Bangladesh's polarized terrain and secular aspirations that have left Islam to Islamists, many lament the absence of an in-between space where Islam could be considered and moulded differently. Allama Abul Hashim's approach spoke in a dynamic manner to being Muslim in South Asia at a particular historical moment. The framework may be worthy of resuscitation to provide ways to draw new boundaries for being Muslim in today's Bangladesh.

Notes:

(¹) For a discussion on how these groups articulate a distance from Islamists, at the same time stressing the importance of cultivating a Muslim subjectivity, see Samia Huq. 2011. 'Discussing the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) Rebellion: Non-Islamist Women and Religious Revival in Urban Bangladesh', *Contemporary Islam*, 5(3): 267-83.

(²) Talukder Maniruzzaman. 1990. 'Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers. pp. 63-93.

(³) Joseph T. O'Connell. 2001. 'The Bengali Muslims and the State: Secularism or Humanity for Bangladesh?', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretive Essays*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 179-208.

(⁴) In asking who writes what the terms of that Islam may be, I draw from the work of Talal Asad who argues that secularism is not a rejection of religion, but a regulation of religion by the state. Talal Asad. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. The

understanding of secularism as a statist project has led scholars to demonstrate how the state then writes religion in a particular way, favouring majoritarian views. Saba Mahmood. 2009. 'Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide', in Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood (eds), *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Berkeley: The Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California. This writing then has a huge influence not only on the nature of secularism that ensues, but the religious character of the state, and the religious and/or secular sensibilities of its citizens. Saba Mahmood. 2008. 'Is Critique Secular', *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion and the Public Sphere*, available online at <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/03/30/is-critique-secular-2/> (accessed on 7 May 2008).

(⁵) He needed support from Western countries, and to re-establish ties with Pakistan and neutralize communists. See Maniruzzaman, 'Bangladesh Politics'; Z.R. Khan. 1990. 'From Mujib to Zia: Elite Politics in Bangladesh', in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers. pp. 50-62.

(⁶) Talukder Maniruzzaman. 1988. *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.

(⁷) These were paramilitary forces set up by the West Pakistani army to fight against the East Pakistani guerrillas in 1971. These paramilitary groups consisted of East Pakistanis who did not believe in the breakup of Pakistan, and under the command of the West Pakistani military committed arson, murder, and rape of the locals.

(⁸) Both Katy Gardener and Peter Bertocci discuss how old syncretistic ways of relating to Islam and thinking of oneself as Muslim have slowly faced erosion in the face of more literalist interpretations of Islam. Gardener attributes this to migration to the Middle East, while Bertocci shows the influence of a textual Islam on Sufi shrines. Katy Gardener. 1998. 'Women and Islamic Revivalism in a Bangladeshi Community', in Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (eds), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Gender in South Asia*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 203-20; Peter J. Bertocci. 2006. 'A Sufi Movement in Bangladesh: The Majibhandari Tariqa and Its Followers', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 40(1): 1-28.

(⁹) Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori argue that the spread of a textually based and scripturally authenticable Islam in the Middle East is indebted to modern education which has allowed the legibility and the concept of legible authenticity to make inroads into religious learning. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori. 1996. *Muslim Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁽¹⁰⁾ For an overview of Islamist rhetoric's relationship with modernity, see Roxanne L. Euben and Mohammad Qasim Zaman. 2009. *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Text and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁽¹¹⁾ Yoginder Sikand. 2003. 'Peace, Dialogue and Da'wa: An Analysis of the Writings of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 14(1): 33–49, see p. 39.

⁽¹²⁾ Abul Hashim. 1965. *As I See It*. Dhaka: Islamic Academy, p. 32.

⁽¹³⁾ Hashim, *As I See It*, p. 33.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Emphasis added.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Hashim, *As I See It*, p. 34.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Hashim, *As I See It*, p. 39.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Abul Hashim. 1970. *Rabbanir drishtite (In the Eyes of the Creator)*. Dhaka: Islamic Academy, p. 21.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Abdul Hashim. 1950. *The Creed of Islam*, pp. 53–54.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Abul Hashim. 1950. *The Creed of Islam*. Dhaka: Islamic Academy, pp. 36–8.

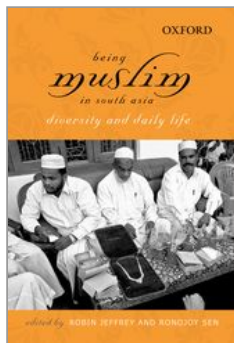
⁽²⁰⁾ Hashim, *Creed of Islam*, p. 26.

⁽²¹⁾ Hashim, *Rabbanir drishtite*.

⁽²²⁾ I borrow the term 'idealist' approach from Ayesha Chaudhry's summary of different hermeneutic approaches. Chaudhry defines the idealist approach as that where the text remains sovereign, but differs from traditionalist approaches in its decreased emphasis on the Sunnah. Ayesha S. Chaudhry. 2008. 'The Problems of Conscience and Hermeneutics: A Few Contemporary Approaches', *Comparative Islamic Studies*, 2(2): 157–70, p. 160.

⁽²³⁾ I borrow this phrase from Talal Asad, who used it to explain the transformation religion underwent through modernity and capitalism—forces that rendered religion merely a matter of internality, devoid of the disciplined embodied practices that had previously marked religiosity. Talal Asad. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

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Media in Pakistan

Ideology, Indoctrination, Intimidation

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Abstract and Keywords

In analyzing the state of media in Pakistan, the chapter argues that in recent years terrorists have often intimidated journalists and dictated the tone of coverage. It notes that English-language media, both television and radio, are of limited influence in Pakistan. In consequence, governments and other players tolerate levels of debate and dissent in English media that would not be allowed in Urdu media, which have far wider influence. The chapter concludes that 'Al Qaeda and its affiliates enjoyed powers of coercion that civil society and the media were less and less able to resist.'

Keywords: media, newspapers, Pakistan, Urdu, journalists, intimidation, television, radio, coercion, terrorists

Electronic media dominates the information sector in Pakistan. Television channels are devoted to political coverage and commentary while the radio—now predominantly FM—is given to music, barring the tribal areas where the Taliban use it to spread their Islamist-puritan intimidatory message to the localities they control. The print medium is not as widespread as elsewhere in South Asia; it is in fact shrinking in the face of television channels. It is divided into Urdu and English with 95:5 ratio, the English sector being read by metropolitan elites, excluding middle- and small-sized cities.

The cables that carry television channels from the satellite—86 in 2012—are mostly located in the urban centres but they cover the country effectively with

footprints extending to much of the countryside. Unlike India, where entertainment dominates, politics trumps all **(p.270)** other topics of discussion. The discourse is by and large conservative although there is no active law forbidding the transmission of the variant point of view. Conservatism means adherence to Pakistani nationalism, which has found its forceful expression in the Urdu print media.

Television channels have tried English as a medium and have failed to capture audiences, owing to much weaker public reliance on the English language compared to India. Consequently, channels looking for television anchors have to take recourse to employing opinion writers in the Urdu press who have the ability to speak Urdu which is unmingled enough with English words to be acceptable. Thus, Pakistani nationalism as expressed in Urdu is now the basis of discourse on television.

The Urdu press is predominantly conservative-Islamic and subject to the gradually stiffening ideology of the state; the English section remains relatively liberal. In the Urdu newspapers, where salaries are low, there is corruption. Governments arrange pay-offs only in the Urdu press while the English side remains less favoured in this respect. The government is living uncomfortably with the freedom of the press, which can be quite irresponsible at times. The Urdu-dominated media, led by television channels, is propelled by ideology, which creates sympathy for the Islamists, acts as the channel of indoctrination of the religious state in tandem with terrorist organizations, and intimidation, which is effective in measure with the gradual erosion of the writ of the state in Pakistan.

Although instruction in the journalism departments is in English too, its tone and temperament are determined by the Urdu world view. Journalism textbooks written by teachers have challenged the Western concept of 'truth' and explained Pakistani journalism in opposition to the 'biased' Western media. In one textbook at least poetry has been set up as an effective medium of journalism.¹ Because **(p.271)** of the nationalist leaning of owners of the early newspapers shortly before 1947, in the midst of communal conflict, journalism has been accepted as a 'mission' and not as 'business'.²

Pakistani journalism plays a positive role vis-à-vis Pakistan's civil society when it subjects political parties to revelations about their conduct. It plays a negative role when it eschews subjecting religious parties and leaders to accountability to the same extent. Insofar as religious parties act against civil society the press abets their instrumentality of oppression and acts against the countervailing capacity of civil society. This negative role is played by the national 'free' press within the parameters of state governance.³

(p.272) The English press has a 'liberal' expression and frequently clashes with the Urdu press, the assault being mostly led by the latter. Pakistan's 'incompleteness' has been frequently highlighted by the rise of Iran and Afghanistan as two 'completely' ideological states in the 1990s. The English press in Pakistan criticizes quite openly the ideological excesses of the state, the lack of humanism in the state's process of Islamization, and sides with the rest of the world in criticizing laws curtailing the rights of the non-Muslims and women in the country. It also opposes such draconian legislations as the blasphemy law.⁴ However, it remains defensive about ideology and will draw a line at how much of ideology it will reject. Its expansion in the 1990s has exceeded that of the country's readership in the English language. As a result, trained manpower is not available to it in the departments of reporting and the newsroom.

Proficiency in English makes a young man eligible for jobs in the global market and the corporate world of Pakistan. Despite relatively high wages, good journalists are not available to English newspapers. They concentrate on the big cities in terms of coverage. Because of lack of reporters the smaller cities are virtually uncovered and the districts not at all. This is the biggest drawback of English journalism in Pakistan. Because of its restriction to the big cities it is unable to establish links with civil society and respond to the requirements of the masses. Pakistan has at least four major English newspapers but they tend to cover efficiently only Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. In the other big cities like Faisalabad and Gujranwala there is hardly any readership for English newspapers.

The economy gets short shrift in the political discourse of Pakistan despite a more realistic recent projection of the national economy in the economic segments of television programming. However, more and more partisan comment on global capital and political interpretation of Pakistan's economic ties abroad obfuscates the depoliticization of discussion that the national economy often demands. Tragically, economic analysis is almost absent from the Urdu press even after 62 years. This means that the anchors who lead discussions on television will seldom bring the national economy and its global connections **(p.273)** under the spotlight, marking the Pakistani media as an isolationist factor.

In English journalism, economic assessment and analysis have been improving over the years and today meet the needs of its readers adequately. Unlike Urdu journalism, it questions ideology, nationalism, and foreign policy—subjects on which the Urdu press has a consensus and discourages 'divisive' debate. It stands firmly against fundamentalism, barring some nationalist spillover from the Urdu press. It recommends 'normalization' with India 'before' the resolution of the Kashmir issue rather than 'after'. It adopts a 'pragmatic' approach to Pakistan's world view; plays down the concept of the 'ummah' after accepting

the nation state as the bedrock of international relations. Although a section of it plays upon the idea of state sovereignty, the general approach of English journalism betrays agreement with the Western view of restrictive state sovereignty.

If the English press predominantly scrutinizes the state and its institutions, the Urdu press predominantly scrutinizes the state of the nation. Pakistani nationalism is more effectively expressed in Urdu than in English. Urdu journalism holds firmly to the Pakistan movement and its foundational doctrine, the two-nation theory, and chastises those who are seen to abandon it in favour of secular yardsticks. While it is true that languages are moulded by national experience, once they create an orientation they begin to command a discourse of their own. Emotive topics under the rubric of nationalism are most appropriately expressed in Urdu. The same exercise often does not succeed in English because of the latter's origin in another culture with whom our nexus is still not broken. Urdu is still struggling with the fast-changing specialized vocabulary of economics. It resists the unfamiliar discourse of philosophy and psychology because that would require new unfamiliar coinage.

The Urdu press in Pakistan is fighting against complexities of expression threatening the reader with 'difficult' words. At the same time, it is struggling to include specialized discussion of the annual budget without expanding the fund of specialized terms. Urdu comment is mostly 'populist' and non-expert, which means it will condemn inflation even when it occurs as a result of low interest rates aimed at spurring growth. Most readers take '*ifrat-e-zarr*' literally to mean 'lots of money' instead of 'inflation'. An Urdu journalist will not **(p.274)** dive deep into modern economic terminology for fear of losing his audience.

The Urdu press is more under scrutiny from the state than the English press. What can be printed in English without fear of adverse reaction from state agencies cannot be printed in an Urdu publication. There are a number of reasons why even a well-documented story cannot be printed in an Urdu newspaper if it deals with a range of subjects relating to ideology subsuming foreign policy themes too. The censorship exercised by the Urdu press could come from the state officialdom that can harm the newspaper. The editor himself could be ideologically hostile to a certain kind of coverage. The paper could be personally targeted by a certain section of the state bureaucracy, in particular intelligence agencies. There could be also pressure from peers in journalism who would then write columns condemning the item.

Writers are often told by the editor that what gets published in the English press cannot be published in Urdu because of the target readership. Very often the nature of the readership is made an excuse to drop a story. This applies particularly to any story that may show India in a good light or describe it getting the upper hand in its rivalry with Pakistan. Negative stories coming from

the countries of the Islamic world routinely get dropped by the Urdu press while being accepted by English newspapers. For some reason, criticism of the state in Urdu hurts more than in English. It is opined that the English press is 'let off' to show to the world outside that the press is free in Pakistan.

It is also possible that state agencies in charge of scrutinizing the papers are not competent in deciphering English. Columnist Afzal Tauseef wrote in a daily that freed nations had free tongues while slave nations had tongues that could not carry the truth. She recounted that she had read a good article in English about those who betrayed Pakistan. There were many big names listed in the article. She thought she could spread the information around by giving a summary of it in her own Urdu column. She was surprised when her column was held back because 'it said too much' although it was just a part of what had appeared already in an English newspaper and had been read by all. She got to know that the editor was scared that the state agencies would get after him for publishing the column. It turned out that the intelligence agencies could read the Urdu papers but were not so good at reading English. English newspapers were allowed freedom in **(p.275)** order to show to the outside world that the press was free in Pakistan and that there was no fundamentalism and oppression in Pakistan, but the same standard was not applied to the Urdu press. English was the language of the colonial masters and was still the language of the bureaucracy and was considered more trustworthy. President Bush spared Pakistan because he could easily understand General Musharraf speaking in English; the same kind of communication was not possible with Saddam Hussein.⁵

Television channels have become more one-sided because of intimidation. The threat comes from jihadi organizations under the influence of al-Qaeda. Writers expressing critical views in English newspapers may get away without being noticed but if they come on television to defend their critique they can get death threats from warlords posing as heads of the Taliban movement. The threat may emanate closer to home from an affiliate of al-Qaeda and the Taliban or from the tribal stronghold of a warlord who has seen the discussion on television. In one case, someone from Peshawar rang a warlord of the Khyber Agency and translated a negative personal comment about the warlord (Mangal Bagh) who then kidnapped a reporter of the offending English newspaper and released him only after an abject apology.

Journalism is under pressure from intimidatory tactics in the districts where the jihadi militias locate themselves. The English-language press misses out on district news because of lack of reporters with the ability to write in English. This blackout on the dominance of jihadis in the countryside is also owing to two additional factors: (a) Urdu newspapers do not pay salaries to their district correspondents, forcing them to rely on handouts they receive from people whose news they get printed in the newspapers and (b) intimidated district

correspondents work literally as the 'press branch' of the jihadi militias, printing only news that shows the jihadis in a favourable light while attacking their victims, non-Muslims and Shias.

This has undermined the 'independence' of the media in the same way as it undermined the 'independence' of the lower judiciary in the districts. If television channels assert their independence daily by attacking the PPP alliance in government, their 'independence' **(p.276)** to do so will be legitimized only if they are able to comment freely on the activities of the jihadi organizations as well. Most newspapers continue to write 'militants' instead of 'terrorists' and abstain from referring to the terrorist organizations by name, only applying the term 'a banned organization' when reporting an act of extreme violence by one of them. In a paper read at a seminar of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) on 18 November 2009, some observations are made about the partisanship or lack of independence of the media in Pakistan:

Many media experts would tell you that the newspapers and TV channels in Pakistan do not perceive the Taliban as a threat to the country or its people despite butchering thousands of men, women and children and flouting in the most blatant manner the rights and protection guaranteed by the constitution. Only a few months ago—before the launch of the military operation in Swat—countless newspaper reports and TV talk shows were opposing military action or justifying the illegal and unconstitutional demands of the Taliban when they had effectively ended the writ of the state in Malakand division and were quite literally slaughtering security forces personnel, public representatives and common citizens. At that time, there were many voices in the media either calling for reaching an understanding, or an agreement with the Taliban and ceding more territory to them, or generally writing and airing favourable reports, either out of fear or on the establishment's behest. It is painfully obvious why elements in the establishment would still be interested in a favourable press for the Taliban and other militant extremists.⁶

The same paper speaks of the trouble one Lahore-based daily had with the warlord of Khyber Agency, Mangal Bagh, on calling him 'a thief' in its second editorial after noting his ransom-taking activities in the agency and in Peshawar. The terrorist warlord picked up the newspaper's reporter from Peshawar and made him grovel at his feet for hours, asking him to reveal the name of the editorial writer. The paper finally gave in, apologized to him and placed an embargo on any news thought to be negative about Mangal Bagh and his men. The editors of a Lahore English-language weekly had to abjectly apologize to a jihadi organization based in Lahore for writing a critical 'inside' **(p.277)** account of the militia. The apology was 'arranged' by the Punjab administration on the condition that similar material would never be published again. A similar incident took place in Lahore after an English-language newspaper published a

cartoon that gave offence to the wife of the Lal Masjid cleric, Abdul Aziz. The paper came under threat from jihadis ready to die for Lal Masjid.

The PIPS paper goes on to put on record another incident which is thought to be typical of the press in Pakistan:

A leading English language daily newspaper referred to the Taliban as militants in its coverage. Then one day someone asked the editor's wife if her husband's newspaper did not consider Taliban terrorists and if it did then why would it not say so in its reports. The following day that newspaper started referring to the Taliban as terrorists. The same week, the newspaper's reporters from Malakand and the NWFP pleaded with the main office in Lahore that the Taliban had threatened to kill them if the paper referred to them as terrorists once more. The next day Taliban had got back the tag of militants.⁷

More blatantly:

In October 2009, a Taliban group sent two letters to the Lahore Press Club—one on October 12 and the other on October 14—warning that if the media 'does not stop portraying us as terrorists ... we will blow up offices of journalists and media organisations'. The list of threats and warnings individually sent to journalists and media organisations is a long one.⁸

One typical example was the threat to author and columnist Dr Ayesha Siddiqa, carried in the publication *Al Qalam* belonging to Jaish-e-Mohammed, rebuking her for writing about the power of Maulana Masood Azhar in Bahawalpur. Dr Siddiqa understood the editorial comment as a threat and was greatly concerned about her safety, as were her friends, especially as her book *Military Inc.* was considered highly critical of the Pakistani army. It is a pointer to the continuing coexistence of the state with jihadi organizations that there was confusion over who fired automatic weapons in November 2009 (p.278) at the house of columnist Kamran Shafi in Wah—the terrorists who rang him after the incident or the state itself?

The creation of uniformity of opinion in the media has directly undermined the authenticity of public opinion in Pakistan. The interaction between the moulder of public opinion and public opinion itself has given rise to the censoring of the variant point of view on television channels. Columnist Saleem Safi wrote in *Jang* (6 December 2009) that during a television discussion he had expressed his position that President Karzai would continue to be president of Afghanistan because the Americans had no alternative to him despite tentative reference to Ashraf Ghani and Agha Sherzai. He had added that sadly Pakistan and the Taliban too had no alternative to Karzai but had thoughtlessly unleashed propaganda against him. Only when non-Pashtun Abdullah Abdullah came up against Karzai in the elections was it realized in Islamabad that Karzai was still

the best option for Pakistan. The television anchor had so disliked his opinion that he had cut it out of the show during editing.

When public opinion is not formed in conditions of freedom guaranteed by the writ of the state, it loses its validity and may be extremely dangerous to the survival of the state. It begins to resemble the public opinion produced in fascist and totalitarian states through a coercive state propaganda machinery. In Pakistan, this lack of freedom emanates from the weak writ of the state. Public opinion thus formed has damaged the economy and curtailed the flexibility of foreign policy; it has habituated the people to see the suppleness of foreign policy options as a kind of capitulation and betrayal of national honour (*ghairat*).⁹

The death of journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad highlights the hazards of writing the truth about al-Qaeda and its ancillary jihadi organizations, some of whom continue to enjoy the patronage of the state intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), as suppliers of mujahideen for Pakistan's covert war in Indian-administered (p.279) Kashmir and, after 2001, against the Indian presence in Afghanistan. Shahzad was killed because he wrote that the Pakistan navy had been penetrated by al-Qaeda and explained the PNS Mehran assault by terrorists on 22 May 2011 as a sequel to the negotiations between the navy and al-Qaeda commander Ilyas Kashmiri for the release of some navy officials arrested for being linked to al-Qaeda. He was probably going to write next about similar penetration into the other two arms of the Pakistani military. He informed some press and human rights circles that he feared the ISI would kill him.

Shahzad was treading sensitive ground with his reports, which he filed after penetrating terrorists' safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He was ignored because he wrote in English and his pieces disturbed only when they were lifted and published by the English language press in Pakistan from the *Asia Times Online*, the Hong Kong-based website where he had risen to the position of an important regional bureau chief. His report on PNS Mehran was declared false by the Pakistani establishment, and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) accused four television channels covering the naval base assault by al-Qaeda of 'provoking anti-national sentiments among viewers by sensitizing events unnecessarily'.

Anyone who has read *Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11*¹⁰ by Shahzad will come to the following conclusions:

1. It is al-Qaeda rather than the Taliban who plan militant attacks in Pakistan and the Taliban execute no operations without the permission of al-Qaeda.

2. Jihadi organizations are subservient to al-Qaeda; at the same time some are also extensions of the Pakistan army.
3. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was shaped by al-Qaeda through Uzbek warlord Tahir Yuldashev after the 2007 Lal Masjid affair.
4. 'Retired' army officers, earlier handling proxy jihad, defected to al-Qaeda, but continued to use contacts within the military on behalf of al-Qaeda.
- (p.280)** 5. Benazir Bhutto was killed by al-Qaeda and not Baitullah Mehsud; he was merely an instrument.
6. The Mumbai attacks of November 2008 were carried out by al-Qaeda through former Pakistani army officers with help from Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) without the knowledge of the ISI despite the fact that LeT was on ISI's leash.
7. Army officers or freedom fighters trained by the army for Kashmir jihad spearheaded al-Qaeda's war against the Pakistan army.
8. The Islamic radicalization of Pakistani society and media mixed with fear of being assassinated by al-Qaeda agents—who include ex-army officers—have tilted the balance of power away from the state of Pakistan to al-Qaeda.
9. The Punjabi Taliban are under the Haqqani network, which is supposed to be aligned with the Pakistan army.
10. The Pakistan army has ex-officers in al-Qaeda, as well as serving officers collaborating with these ex-officers.

Shahzad knew that he was going to die and left clues behind as to who would try to kill him. He pointed to the state agency, ISI, as an adjunct of the al-Qaeda affiliates it patronizes and protects. He wrote to a media organization and a human rights representative about a heated discussion he had had with an officer of the ISI during which he was given an indirect warning that he might be killed. When the subject of an inquiry is the army or its intelligence agencies, inquiry commissions routinely do not name names and pretend to be mystified by the subject. In the case of the murder of Shahzad in May 2011, a commission headed by Justice Saqib Nisar of the Supreme Court took six months instead of the mandated six weeks to say that it did not know who killed him.

Is al-Qaeda too strong for the Pakistan army to fight? Since al-Qaeda is linked to the Taliban and Pakistan's own jihadi militias and the vast madrasa network, would it be wise for the Pakistan army to fight al-Qaeda? Would such a fight unleash desertions and raise the possibility of civil war, thus distracting the army from its mandated task of fighting India? More objectively, is the internal challenge more insurmountable than the external one against India and the United States, where its nuclear assets come into play effectively?

(p.281) Opinion surveys say Pakistanis do not think ill of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The politicians say the war against terrorism is not Pakistan's war and fighting it will serve the strategic objectives of the United States in the region without advancing Pakistan's cause against India. Why should the army fight an enemy not recognized as such by Pakistan's parliament, which agrees completely with the view that the drones of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) targeting al-Qaeda should be shot down and supplies from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—going to Afghanistan for troops fighting al-Qaeda and Pakistan-based Taliban—should be blocked to teach the United States a lesson for killing Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad? Given this situation, can the media dare to tell the truth?

Fighting India is the primary task given to the Pakistan army by Pakistani nationalism. It would be dereliction on the part of the Pakistani generals to deflect attention from this primary task to fighting elements that cannot be defeated and a clash with whom may actually cause defections and civil war. The mental grooves created by textbooks and years of indoctrination incline the army towards fighting India. The same can be said to be true of the media, where Urdu-based writers and anchors often express views absorbed from decades of ideological indoctrination. It is more satisfying to fire a Hatf-10 tactical nuclear missile to set the dovescotes of Hindu India aflutter than to persuade a heavily Islamist army to fight al-Qaeda. Anatol Lieven describes this state of mind:

A common definition of tragedy is that of a noble figure betrayed and destroyed by some inner flaw. The Pakistani military is in some ways an admirable institution, but it suffers from one tragic feature which has been with it from the beginning, which has defined its whole character and world view, which has done terrible damage to Pakistan and which could in some circumstances destroy Pakistan and its armed forces altogether. This is the military's obsession with India in general, and Kashmir in particular ... both the military's prestige and the personal experiences of its men have become especially focused on Kashmir.¹¹

(p.282) A book edited by Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States, Maleeha Lodhi—*Pakistan: Beyond the 'Crisis State'*—has historian Ayesha Jalal depicting the scene in Pakistan:

Besieged by enemies within and without, television's spin-doctors, impelled by the state's intelligence agencies, attribute Pakistan's multifaceted problems to the machinations of invisible external hands, as opposed to historically verifiable causes of internal decline and decay. If India's hegemonic designs are not hindering Pakistan at every step, America and Israel are believed to be hatching plots to break up the world's only Muslim nuclear state. Call it paranoia, denial or intellectual paralysis, but

Pakistan's deeply divided and traumatised people are groping for a magical formula to evade collective responsibility for their failure to gel as a nation.¹²

She refers to collective 'denial', which will not allow Pakistan to take on al-Qaeda:

Forced to imbibe official truths, the vast majority of literate Pakistanis take comfort in ignorance, scepticism and, most disconcertingly, in a contagion of belief in conspiracy theories. The self-glorification of an imagined past matched by habits of national denial have assumed crisis proportions today when Pakistan's existence is under far more serious threat from fellow Muslims than it was in 1947 from rival non-Muslim communities.¹³

Writing for *Asia Times Online* in 2008, Syed Saleem Shahzad warned about the 'moulding' of the Pakistan army's mind by al-Qaeda:

The crux is, while America was playing its game, so too was al-Qaeda. Through terror attacks, al-Qaeda was able to disrupt the economy, and by targeting the security forces, al-Qaeda created splits and fear in the armed forces, to the extent that they thought twice about dancing to the US's tune. Unlike Musharraf, when he wore two hats, of the president and of army chief, the new head of the military, professional soldier General Ashfaq Kayani, had to listen to the chatter of his men and the **(p.283)** intelligence community at grand dinners. What he heard was disturbing. Soldiers from the North-West Frontier Province region were completely in favour of the Taliban, while those from the countryside of Punjab—the decisive majority in the armed forces—felt guilty about fighting the Taliban and reckoned it was the wrong war.

The state of Pakistan has lost its writ in most of its territory including the 'ungoverned spaces' of its vast tribal areas from where it recruited non-state actors for its covert wars. Where the writ is still intact, a number of sources of intimidation haunt the media. To make their threats credible the state and non-state actors have allegedly killed 39 journalists between 1998 and 2011. In 2011—inclusive of August 2011 only—five of them were killed, amid rumours that the deaths were connected to terrorists as well as state agency: Shafiullah Khan, the *News*, 17 June 2011, in Wah Cantonment; Asfandiyar Khan, *Akhbar-e-Khyber*, 11 June 2011, in Peshawar; Saleem Shahzad, *Asia Times Online*, 29 or 30 May 2011, in Mandi Bahauddin; Nasrullah Khan Afridi, *Khyber News Agency, Television Mashreq*, 10 May 2011, in Peshawar; Wali Khan Babar, *Geo TV*, 13 January 2011, in Karachi.

The state in Pakistan is in serious economic trouble, set to contract through high interest rates in the face of fear of hyperinflation. In 2012, services provided by the state such as infrastructure, transportation, and education approached

complete breakdown. The executive was paralysed by political instability, fear of the rising tide of terrorism, and a steady trespass by al-Qaeda and its affiliates into the big cities of the country. Basic life-sustaining supplies of goods and services were in short supply, potable water and gas were scarce, and public movement was unsafe because of terrorism and rising crime. Some areas, like the cities located on the Peshawar-Kohat Road running along the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), were approaching the condition of Karachi where the executive was interfacing with terrorists and criminal gangs instead of countering them. The judiciary was under intimidation from the various groups fighting the state and themselves, with the result that arrested terrorists and criminals were not punished by the law.

Pakistan is approaching the identity of a 'predatory' state, a description once applied to Afghanistan where anarchical energies of an imploding state threatened its neighbourhood. In both Swat, a tribal **(p.284)** area in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and Karachi in Sindh, the 'predatory' infrastructure set up by al-Qaeda and the crime mafias is not easy to reclaim. In Swat and the federal tribal area of Bajaur the army has not been able to restore normal order after driving out the terrorists and their affiliated mafias. The reign of intimidation lifted, people initially went back to being loyal to the state of Pakistan in 2009; but in 2011, they were losing trust in the capacity of the state of Pakistan to reclaim. The instrument of the 'monopoly of power' of the state, the Pakistan army, is not completely willing to turn inward from the borders and fight a war on the streets of Pakistan for which it was not trained. Its anti-India orientation resists calls from outside—especially the United States and European Union (EU)—to face up to the challenge of terrorism after normalizing relations with India.

As a result, Pakistan has chosen an extremely isolationist policy path based on anti-Americanism, not realizing that it has gradually embraced the world view of the very scourge it pretends to fight: al-Qaeda. The Pakistan army is sensitive to charges of Pakistan-supported cross-border terrorist raids into Afghanistan. In retaliation it accused the CIA of operating against the interest of Pakistan in Pakistan. It acted out of anger rather than policy after the killing of Osama bin Laden. The CIA-ISI spat had been going on since 2010 when a report prepared at an American university said the ISI was actually paying the Taliban to kill Americans in Afghanistan. The arrest and jailing of CIA agent Raymond Davis in Pakistan was the nadir in this relationship. NATO supplies, already subject to colossal corruption by Pakistanis, were vandalized in Pakistan, and American officials were harassed in an unprecedented drive by the Pakistani police, while commentators in Islamabad were made to say Peshawar experienced fewer Taliban attacks because the police were blocking Americans' movements, meaning that attacks owned by the Taliban were actually carried out by America!

Intense in Urdu media but not so intense in English media, the dominant opinion is anti-American, led by diplomats angered by what they think is a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty through the Kerry-Lugar Act. No alternative to American aid is proposed: everyone thinks that America needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs America, meaning that anti-Americanism will actually bring higher political and financial dividends. No proper analysis of the post- **(p.285)** NATO order in Afghanistan is carried out except that all will be well in Pakistan 'once the Americans are gone'.

The many reasons for anti-Americanism include how the war against terrorism is interpreted and broadcast by state institutions including the government. The most meaningful gloss attached to incidents of terrorism is that the Taliban that hurt Pakistan do so because they are being bribed by India, whose weapons are found in South Waziristan, and proof of whose interference in Balochistan is undeniable. This feeds into the textbook designation of India as the enemy in Pakistani nationalism. The United States becomes attached to it because of the leeway it has afforded India inside Afghanistan, allowing it to open dozens of 'consulates' there. When the Interior Minister says that 'unfriendly agencies' are behind the Taliban terrorism, people tend to add the United States to the equation against all logic.

The other significant element is the state of intimidation under which the population, the state, and the media are living. This emanates from the low point reached in the state's loss of internal sovereignty and loss of the right over the 'monopoly of violence'. Magazines published by banned terrorist organizations regularly publish lists of 'renegade' journalists whom the editors consider 'against Islam'. Although no direct threats to life are issued, the lists are interpreted as messages for the errant writers to stop writing against what the Islamists consider impermissible.

Intimidation could be overwhelmingly the reason for Pakistan's anti-Americanism. A jihadi publication called *al-Salam*, by publishing the list of 'undesirable' journalists and columnists, silenced many objective analysts. Word of mouth, a telephone call, an email, or a friendly word from intelligence agencies, can create a wave of opinion that spares the jihadi organizations and blames the United States for heaping one-sided criticism on Pakistan for not tackling banned organizations that Pakistan never really banned. This campaign of intimidation not only affected the populations that lived in areas controlled by the jihadis, but also the politicians who came from there. South Punjabi politicians and members of the FATA simply could not afford to label the Taliban and their jihadi networks as terrorists.

The role of the intelligence agencies cannot be ignored in producing mass anti-Americanism. Ex-ISI officers pour out venom against **(p.286)** the 'perfidy of the United States' for short-changing Pakistan and always siding with India on a

daily basis on television channels. In a shocking interview (the *News*, 3 November 2009) ex-ISI officer Khalid Khwaja explained how adherence to Islam actually meant standing up and opposing the United States. He was inducted into the ISI after he became hard to handle in the air force, meaning that anyone who is found to be an Islamist is considered good for the ISI rank and file. Following this change, Khwaja told his colleagues that he would follow none but Allah and the Quran. From there began his hatred of India, the United States, and Israel. Following the complaints about his behaviour, Khwaja was referred to the ISI by the air chief.

Khalid Khwaja was killed in 2010 in the tribal agency of North Waziristan by the Taliban, possibly on orders from al-Qaeda. However, on the face of it, it appeared that he was shot because of his connections with the apostate minority community of Ahmadis after being snitched on by an Islamabad journalist who had once interviewed Osama bin Laden and was rumoured to be close to the ISI. Khwaja himself was a go-between for al-Qaeda at one time and claimed that he had settled a pay-off between al-Qaeda and Pakistan's top politician (and now prime minister) Nawaz Sharif.

The article 'Khalid Khwaja: Once an Insider' (the *News*, 27 September 2009) has Khwaja saying that the Pakistan Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif (PMLN) had an Islamist bias and was therefore the choice of the ISI to rule Pakistan after the end of the 'Islamic' rule of General Zia ul-Haq in 1988. Together with fellow-ISI officer Brigadier (Retd) Imtiaz Ahmad he believed that the 'interest of the state' was paramount while obedience to an erring elected government was not. Of course the 'interest of the state' was to be determined by the officers who 'know more than the government'. Khwaja is quoted as saying: 'Islamic leaders acting as Afghan war veterans had joined hands with Nawaz Sharif to block Pakistan People's Party's entry into power since 1988. These leaders played their part in toppling the PPP regime twice and tried to thwart the PPP in the electoral processes.' That the PMLN is soft on the Taliban was often opined by analysts in Pakistan. It was also clear that the biggest democratic beneficiary of anti-Americanism in Pakistan was the PMLN. In a twisted way this made it the most suitable government for Pakistan because its leader Nawaz Sharif is also known as a pragmatist.

(p.287) Former French investigative magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguiere, later the EU's envoy to Washington on issues related to the financing of terrorism, in his book, *What I Could Not Say*, narrates what happened to him after he came to Pakistan in 2006 to investigate a suicide bombing that had killed 11 French naval contractors three years earlier. He writes that 'Pakistani security officials were uncooperative and hostile; French officials in Pakistan were the target of threats and physical intimidation: a way of dissuading us from returning'. His conclusion is that 'the central government has lost control of certain elements of

the army and the ISI, an intelligence service that no longer has the trust of its foreign partners'.¹⁴

Anti-Americanism feeds on a multiplicity of sources; anti-imperialist literature that was once the stronghold of the left is now the bailiwick of the right. Pakistan will be damaged by it because as a state with little internal sovereignty and a collapsing economy it will need to evolve policies based on pragmatism rather than *ghairat*. The embrace of anti-Americanism by the electronic media was an overwhelming phenomenon, affecting public opinion and encouraging the Pakistan army to pronounce on Pakistan's growing alienation from the West more blatantly. It encouraged terrorist elements to be bolder in their condemnation and intimidation of moderates in Pakistan.

The Pakistani media was nurtured on the ideological national narrative which centred on Pakistan as an entity created, in the face of India's opposition, in the name of Islam.¹⁵ The military's reliance on **(p.288)** domestically located non-state actors as warriors against India—and their subsequent shifting of loyalty to al-Qaeda—has damaged the writ of the state. This led to intimidation of the people and the media by terrorists. The upshot of these conditions was the tendency of a number of media workers, already Islamist in their outlook, to give their assent to the world view of al-Qaeda and the intelligence agencies. The spread of anti-Americanism originated in the Pakistan army and spread to the population because of the supremacy of the military in Pakistan's political order. In consequence, al-Qaeda and its affiliates enjoyed powers of coercion that civil society and the media were less and less able to resist.

Notes:

(¹) A.R. Khalid. 1990. *Concepts of Journalism*. Lahore: Caravan Book House, p. 22:

It is an incontestable fact that our communication media are based on Western models. The reason for this blind imitation is that we are victims of British neo-colonial and imperial system which we followed indiscriminately in every walk of life. This engendered in us certain slavish attitudes and tendencies which are so deeply rooted in our unconscious minds that it is not easy to shed them.

On p. 25, he says: 'The objectives of journalism can be appropriately determined only in the light of the nation's traditional values and its ideological moorings.' The head of the Department of Mass Communication, Punjab University, Mr Miskeen Ali Hijazi writes in the preface of the book: 'The chapter on the 'Freedom of Truth' requires special mention because there is a bit of confusion about the concept and limits of freedom in this country. Mr A.R. Khalid has worked hard to discuss the social, moral and national responsibilities of the journalists in the Islamic and democratic Pakistan.' Mr Hijazi once stated at a

seminar that sectarian terrorism in Pakistan was funded by the United States and denied that sectarianism existed in Pakistan.

(²) Hameed Nizami. 1962. *Weekly Lahore*, 25 February: 'Journalism is not a business or occupation. It is a mission. It has its own message, its own set of principles.'

(³) Musa Khan Jalalzai. 1996. *The NGO Conspiracy in Pakistan*. Lahore: Classic. Dr Yunus Khan, advocate of the Lahore High Court, says in the preface: 'The main purposes of the establishment of NGOs by the Multinational Industrial Corporations are to use them as administrative force in Pakistan.' He gives the example of Russia where these 'welfare' organizations were set up by the United States after the break-up of the Soviet Union. He says: 'Having taken advantage of the Muslim ignorance, the United States and European Community however decided to end religious fanaticism and promote capitalist system of living in Pakistan.' He is of the opinion that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan have been opposing every law in Pakistan 'since their inception', including the appointment of President Tarar and passage of Shariat Bill; 'they oppose anyone who works for the aggrandisement of Pakistan'.

(⁴) It should however be noted that in case the English paper has a 'sister' Urdu publication, the view there will remain in favour of the blasphemy law.

(⁵) *Pakistan*. 19 August 2003.

(⁶) Najam U. Din. 2009. 'Mainstream Media's Response to Radical Extremism'. Paper presented at PIPS Seminar, Lahore, 18 November.

(⁷) Din, 'Mainstream Media's Response'.

(⁸) Din, 'Mainstream Media's Response'.

(⁹) Lyrical columnist Irfan Siddiqi wrote in *Jang* (17 October 2009) that the bride of *ghairat* (honour) has left the house of Pakistan and that carrying the *kashkol* (begging bowl) and wandering in the streets of the world is the fate of the nation. We are empty in the pocket of our robes (*tahi-daman*) and cannot live within our means; but then why is the spark of *ghairat* rising from our ashes?

(¹⁰) Syed Saleem Shahzad. 2011. *Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11*. London: Pluto Press.

(¹¹) Anatol Lieven. 2011. *Pakistan: A Hard Country*. London: Allen Lane, p. 135.

(¹²) Ayesha Jalal. 2011. 'The Past as Present', in Maleeha Lodhi (ed.), *Pakistan: Beyond the 'Crisis State'*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, pp. 7-20, see p. 10.

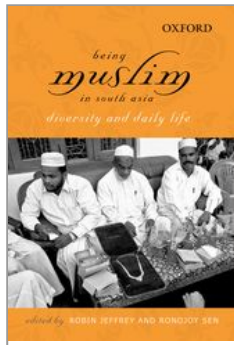
(¹³) Jalal, 'Past as Present', p. 10.

(¹⁴) Sebastian Rotella. 2009. 'Famed French Judge Bruguiere Tells of a Troubled Pakistan', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November.

(¹⁵) Section 123-A of the Pakistan Penal Code says:

Whoever within or without Pakistan with intent to influence or knowing it to be likely that he will influence any person or the whole or any section of the public, in a manner likely to be prejudicial to the safety (or ideology) of Pakistan, or to endanger the sovereignty of Pakistan in respect of all or any of the territories lying within its borders, shall by words, spoken or written by signs or visible representation (abuse Pakistan), condemn the creation of Pakistan by virtue of the Partition of India which was effected on the fifteenth day of August 1947, or advocate the curtailment or abolition of the sovereignty of Pakistan in respect of all or any of the territories lying within its borders, whether by amalgamation with the territories of the neighbouring States or otherwise, shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

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Kafka in India

Terrorism, Media, Muslims

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Abstract and Keywords

In post-9/11 India, scores of individuals (including minors under 18) were arrested, tortured, imprisoned and killed in 'encounters' as 'terrorists'. Though some have been released from prisons, most continue languishing in jail. A running thread behind all these cases of arrest, torture, killing –beyond the divide of region, language, profession, age and gender –seems to be the intertwining theme of 'treason' and 'terrorism' which media, security agencies, institutions of law, and police collaboratively manufacture, rather than report, in such a way that terrorism and Islam or Muslims become synonymous. I argue that Indian media discourse on terrorism is linked to West's discourse on War on Terror so intimately that one might substitute the other; both painstakingly produce and distinguish 'good Muslims' from 'bad Muslims' and thereby vilify Islam. Based on the thick description of the dynamic amongst, terrorism, nation and media, I demonstrate how the post-9/11 political-legal landscape of India is perfectly Kafkaesque.

Keywords: Kafka, terrorism, media, War on Terror, nation, treason, security agencies, police, vilification, Muslims

You can't defend yourself against this court; you have to acknowledge your guilt. Acknowledge your guilt at the first opportunity. Only then are you given the possibility of escape, only then.

—Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

In post-9/11 India, scores of Muslims, including minors under 18, were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and killed in encounters as ‘terrorists’. Though some have been released, most languish in jail.¹ **(p.290)** A thread running through these varied cases of arrest, torture, and killing—beyond the divide of region, language, profession, age, and gender—involves the intertwining themes of terrorism and ‘treason against the nation’. The state’s statistics on terrorists are revealing: 54 cases filed against a single ‘terrorist’ in six cities; in Ahmedabad and Surat, the police charge sheets comprise 60,000 pages in 35 cases and in Jaipur 12,000 pages in eight cases.² In understanding the connection between treason and terrorism, I dwell on media’s pivotal role. Based on the thick description of the dynamic amongst terrorism, media, and nation, it is my contention that the post-9/11 political landscape of India is Kafkaesque.

This chapter draws on my fieldwork on Indian media.³ In the first part, I spell out my argument that media discourses on terrorism say very little either about terrorism or media; both are instead informed by the myth of nation, the media’s ‘coverage’ of terrorism being merely a micro theme in the macro national myth. Contra the **(p.291)** *doxa* which views terrorism legally, I aver that it is the dominant myth of nation, reiterated ceaselessly by the media, that defines terrorism and renders law peripheral, if not irrelevant. I close this part by outlining my methodology. Part two begins with a brief description of media and terrorism in India to focus on this phenomenon in the post-9/11 period. Here I argue that the post-9/11 terrorism is understood as specific, not generic. Contrary to denials issued by media pundits, politicians, including mainstream voices in so-called civil society, post-9/11 terrorism is ultimately about ‘Muslim terrorists’. Here I present qualitative data from media reports on terrorism (mainly mainstream English television channels, newspapers—online and print—and magazines) and testimonials about and by terrorists, to illustrate my contention about the Kafkaesque landscape of media discourses on terrorism in India. As a case study, I analyse an important NDTV talk show (of 2001) on Muslims and terrorism. Next I focus on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Indian Mujahideen (IM)—two most-discussed ‘terrorist’ outfits—to show inconsistency, inaccuracy, even contradiction, in media reports on them. I also discuss what remains invisible in media—the repression of evidence, secret torture chambers, and illegal means deployed against ‘terrorists’. Critical to my analysis is also how media reporting on Muslim terrorists bears important markers of their cultural identity as well as how the mediatized discourses on terrorism may impact the judicial processes. The materials and analyses in the second part flow from and substantiate my argument, which I elaborate below.

The Argument

Why Kafka? I invoke Kafka because he unveils the working of law and its claim to self-enlightenment. He uncovers that which lies beneath the reason embodied in law. Kafka illustrates how the pursuit of delivery of justice leads to its abortion, leaving the seeker frustrated. In depicting, fear, alienation, exception,

and arbitrariness that inform as much as constitute the gigantic juridical machinery, Kafka makes fathomable the very unfathomability that is law and the court, the sine qua non of modernity.⁴ For my purpose, this **(p.292)** modernity is institutionalized in the nation state, the distinction of which in the last decade has been its unprecedented securitization, Muslims being its prime object. Kafka is also important because he reads modernity from the margin: as a member of a minority inhabiting the nationalist environment of early twentieth-century Austro-Hungarian Empire. My point is not that his prose mirrors his identity. What I maintain is that his prose *also* bears a mark of his minoritized position and his quest for a new Kabbalah.⁵ In Kafka I also find an ethnographer: his attention to the ordinary and petty details is remarkable.⁶

Clearly, twenty-first century India is not Kafka's Europe. Kafka's insight, echoing a fable from La Fontaine,⁷ however, is this: the sovereign decides before legal procedures unfold; judgment is delivered prior to trial.⁸ Law seeks a criminal to meet its longing to justify itself. Contrary to its self-claim, law sustains itself in relation to things other than itself—a point important to legal anthropology.⁹ In short, like media, law reproduces and reflects power relations in its full intensity.¹⁰ In three steps, let me elucidate my argument. To my knowledge, **(p. 293)** it has not been made before, including in the volume *Muslims and Media Images*,¹¹ which attempts no theorization and its editor, Ather Farouqui, repeats the liberals' dogma: 'why the Indian Muslim middle class is regressive and thereby shy of its identity and tends to dance to the tunes of Muslim fundamentalists'.¹²

- Terrorism is not purely a legal phenomenon; it is ultimately cultural insofar as the cultural is simultaneously political.
- If so, it is equally national because from the nineteenth century onwards culture has been construed (if non-anthropologically) in national catalogue. Globalization does not dislodge the nation state; instead, the nation state repositions itself in a globalized world.
- Modern media and nation are twins: media is thus national(ist). Media rarely reports 'facts'; rather it fits 'facts' of terrorism into a prior, violently hegemonic myth of nation. Thus, as I show below, even the deadly explosion and killings in Hyderabad's mosque and Malegaon's graveyard were attributed to 'Muslim terrorist's by the media.¹³ Even the *Hindu*, considered 'liberal', and 'secular', is no exception. In its editorial of 15 October 2007, it reproduced the police/intelligence versions to blame the Mecca mosque and Ajmer shrine blasts to 'Islamist terror groups'.¹⁴

(p.294) It is my contention that mainstream media (national Hindi and English weeklies and newspapers, including the *Hindu*, as well as Hindi and English television news channels), certainly since 9/11, has often vilified Islam as an intolerant religion and Muslims as a threatening, disloyal other. As the data

below shows, the media depicts someone as a terrorist not because he has been legally convicted of a crime, but more because his name is Muslim, he wears a beard, he lives in a specific (Muslim) area, attends a mosque or madrasa, carries Urdu pamphlets, or because of, inter alia, these markers he is suspected of being loyal to Pakistan, India's arch-enemy. During my fieldwork in Delhi, it was striking to observe that the police's anti-terrorism billboards (see Figure 14.1) were planted mostly in Muslim areas; they were few and far between in Hindu areas. Thus, the media and government described Azamgarh (a district with significant Muslim population in eastern Uttar Pradesh) as '*aātankgarh* [bastion of terror]'.¹⁵ More

(p.295) recently, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) described north Bihar as 'another Azamgarh'¹⁶ because several Muslim 'terrorists' were abducted and arrested from Darbhanga, Samastipur, and Madhubani—districts which have a noticeable Muslim population. Of importance here is the fact that no warrant was issued or shown before arresting 'terrorists' and, contrary to IB's claims, local communities from where arrests were made regarded them as 'normal', 'gentle (*sharīf*)' persons. Kafeel, described as a 'terror mastermind', is a pious bicycle mechanic who offers prayers five times a day.¹⁷ Such a depiction of Muslim symbols and areas by the media works as a certifier of nation's myth. Below, I outline my theoretical framework.

Nation, Media, and Terrorism

Given the mass-mediated world we inhabit, to speak of terrorism is to speak of media; and to speak of both, I suggest, is to speak of the nation state. Globalization does not dislodge the nation state—as the euphoria of the 1990s held it¹⁸—rather, it transforms the ways in **(p.296)** which the nation state begins to play itself on the global and domestic stages. At work is what Liah Greenfeld calls 'globalization of nationalism'.¹⁹ Again, contra the 1990s theorists who viewed media as globalization's key agent (in Appadurai's term, 'mediascape'), I hold that the media continues to produce and consume the nation. My disavowal of a rupture from national to global does not dismiss global forces; on the contrary, I stress how the Indian media transforms global discourses on terrorism to weave a national narrative vis-à-vis the West and South Asia.

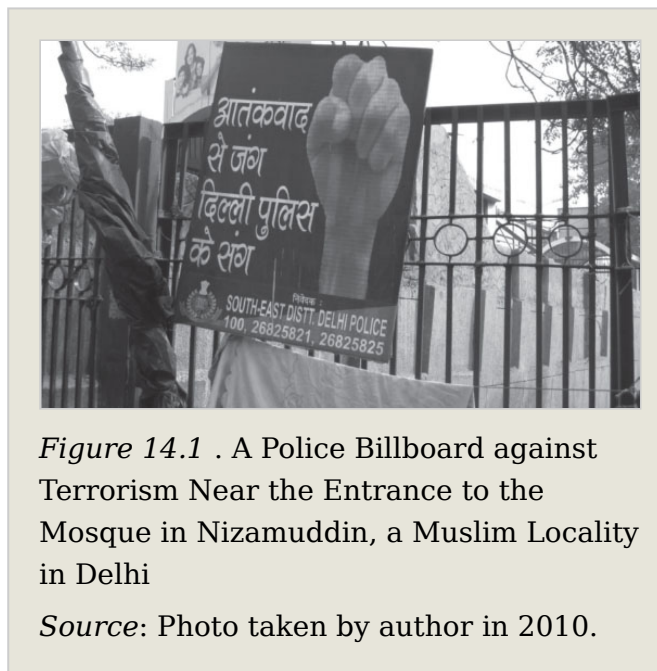


Figure 14.1 . A Police Billboard against Terrorism Near the Entrance to the Mosque in Nizamuddin, a Muslim Locality in Delhi

Source: Photo taken by author in 2010.

Historically, the onset of mass media and nationalism are nearly coeval.²⁰ Following Anderson,²¹ the nation as an imagined community was inconceivable without the print media. As media is a nation builder, nation and media are almost one: national media in the same way as there is media patriotism.²² So intimate they are that news and flags may appear the same. 'National news stories,' writes Rantanen, 'serve as flags constantly reminding citizens of the national agenda.'²³ Based on case studies of German, Russian, and US news agencies, Rantanen stresses the necessity for 'news to serve the national interests'.²⁴ These agencies exemplify the cases 'where either the state interferes, using the nationality of news as a reason, or the agencies themselves use the nationality of news to ask the government to interfere'.²⁵

(p.297) I agree with Waisbord that 'the media greatly contribute to the persistence of the national in a supposedly post-national era'.²⁶ It stages and reinforces the definition of 'the other'—the foreigner, the traitor, the migrant, the refugee, and so on. By national I also mean the myth and grand stories of the nation, which are indispensable to any understanding of media. I use myth not as obverse of 'real'. Myth mediates 'between the sacred [à la Durkheim] and the profane, the world of everyday common sense and the arcane, the individual and the social'.²⁷ Myth is 'a sacred, societal story that draws from archetypal figures and forms'²⁸ to shape the present so as to mould the future. To Georges Sorel, ideology grows out of myth and at the same time begets myth.²⁹ Myth is a cultural mechanism to generate order and coherence in the social universe.³⁰ Myth entails who belongs to a social order; 'other'ing is integral to myth's pursuit for order of things. Silverstone and Lule stress the societal dimension of myth. I argue that society in the post-World War II era is construed as nation.³¹ By myth I mean the myth of and about nation. In my view, myth and history are connected; historical figures and events get mythologized inasmuch as myths render history discernible. I disavow the modernist trope which assigns myth to the pre-modern and history to the modern. The media is a narrator par excellence of a nation's myth. **(p.298)** Silverstone calls 'television like myth'³² and Lule describes the *New York Times* 'as a State's scribe, our society's privileged and prominent storyteller';³³ we can extend their argument to include new media such as the Internet, including blogs and free comments posted there.³⁴

I came to this argument during my fieldwork and read the cited literature subsequently. I interviewed journalists of print and electronic media. Broadly, two responses were discernible to the question of how the media treats Muslim issues and Muslims—the denier and the endorser (both these words are mine). Deniers held that there was no bias against Muslims; they were professionals and 'covered' Muslim issues like any other. This denial coexisted with the assertion that Muslims themselves were to be blamed for their negative images in the media (similar to America's minorities³⁵). Leaving the contradiction aside (if there is no anti-Muslim bias, how are Muslims themselves responsible for it?),

let me summarize this position. Vinod Mehta,³⁶ editor of *Outlook*, holds that ‘the English-language media is not biased [against Muslims]’ and then goes on to say that such negative images exist because there are ‘too few liberal Muslims’, there is no ‘forward movement ... amongst Muslims ... towards modernization’. Mehta’s tutorial to Muslims is similar to Fukuyama’s³⁷ asking them to decide if they wanted ‘to make peace with modernity’. I will not cite Chandan Mitra,³⁸ editor of the **(p.299)** *Pioneer*, for he is visibly on the right. Similar views exist in academia too. Rajni Kothari, ‘one of the founding fathers of Indian political science’,³⁹ advises Muslims to ‘view themselves not communally but socially’ and adds that they have a ‘tendency to exaggerate the role of the media in mediating inter-community affairs’ and ‘see matters dichotomously or buckle under pressure’.⁴⁰

Returning to my fieldwork account, the Secretary of the Press Club of India told me: ‘There is no Muslim angle or content of the news.’ When cases of biases were brought to my interlocutors’ attention, their response was ‘lack of professionalism’ among reporters, anchors, and channels. More discussion led to responses that Indian media did not use ‘Islamic terrorist’, ‘jihadis’ first; ‘After America used it, we also did,’ said the Secretary of the Press Club. To my question about why the Indian media imitated the United States, another journalist replied: ‘This is what sells in market.’ In contradistinction to deniers, endorsers held that biases against Muslims did exist. Their explanation centred on individual journalists or channels. An oft-repeated view was ‘RSSization [shift to the right symbolized by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the fountainhead of anti-Muslim Hindu nationalism]’ of Indian society and of media too. The illegal destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992 was its benchmark. But when attention was drawn to biases among the non-RSS channels (like NDTV), they continued to hold on to their explanation. They held that Muslim journalists’ greater representation would alone decrease, if not eliminate, anti-Muslim biases.⁴¹ There was also a third response: measured silence and swift diversion from the topic.

(p.300) Puzzling as initial weeks of fieldwork were, I continued meeting journalists, reading as many newspapers and magazines as I could, and watching myriad news channels. I began to realize that the issue was not of an individual journalist or channel. Nor was it due to lack of professionalism—for no one ever said that a journalist or channel exposed a case of financial fraud even though he lacked professionalism. Observing the media (I had also done this during my previous visit to Delhi and Mumbai, from November 2009 to February 2010) and talking to journalists from diverse persuasions made me realize that there were styles, themes, and narratives which cut across individuals, channels, and even ideologies. I had come close to the argument of the media as narrator, and producer of the nation’s myth. My interlocutors too seemed to point towards the salience of myth, though they named it ‘market’.

The centrality of myth and nation in understanding media also addresses the ‘communal quagmire’—Hindus versus Muslims. Certainly, this issue is important. But far more important is the myth, or nation’s script, which is almost independent of an individual, Muslim or Hindu. In the Bollywood film, *Shaurya* (2008), Muslims are described as follows: ‘Their seasonal religion is stamped with terror’, Muslim female children are ‘not children, they are bitches of a terrorist’, and ‘In their [Muslims’] community there is only poison, only poison’. The film is directed by a Muslim, Samar Khan, and its script is also co-written by Khan.⁴² My argument gets further salience as over 50 per cent of Bollywood’s lower ranks of workers (technicians, spot boys, and trolley pullers) are Muslims⁴³ and three Khans—Aamir, Shah Rukh, and Salman—‘rule’ the industry. However, in nearly all films the Khans appear as exemplary, heroic Hindu characters (their role as Muslim, surely as positive, is rare). Likewise, if a non-Muslim in media shows prejudice against Muslims—as Praveen Swami does now (see below) and several other prominent English journalists did in the past—it is not just because of their individual proclivity, it is equally because of the national myth, or as my interlocutors said, ‘this **(p.301)** is what sells in market’. Importantly, my argument goes past the fringe conspiracy theory according to which there is a sort of planning amongst media groups to malign Muslims. That might be the case. However, journalists—television or print, including invited guests—tell stories that make sense to them and which they think they will appeal to readers and viewers, a point Larson⁴⁴ also makes about the US media vis-à-vis racial minorities, and thereby enhance television rating points (TRPs), which influence advertisements and profits.

The logic of selling to a market presupposes two broad kinds of Muslims: good and bad,⁴⁵ extremist and moderate.⁴⁶ Good Muslims need to be applauded because they rehearse the myth of nation. Bad Muslims are those who do not; they need to be pedagogized and managed. An apt example is the 2001 debate between the ‘fundamentalist’ Syed Ahmed Bukhari, the Imam of Delhi’s Jama Masjid and the ‘liberal’ Shabana Azmi, a film actress. As I discuss below, this debate telecast on NDTV (the English channel), did not reflect the diverse, complex array of views among Muslims; rather it was staged to manufacture and normalize the West’s categories of ‘fundamentalist’, ‘terrorist’ Muslims on one hand and ‘moderate’ Muslims on the other. Such a depiction of Muslims by the media is seldom different from terrorists’ own portrayal of the world into binary categories. To Laqueur, ‘the terrorists need the media, and the media find in terrorism all the ingredients of an exciting story’.⁴⁷ In my view, the media does not **(p.302)** simply ‘find in terrorism all the ingredients of an exciting story’; it also shapes them. The media’s search for what Laqueur calls ‘fresh excitement’ also impacts the ways in which experts comment on it. Might it be that in writing about terrorism, the assumed distance between the object and subject gets dissolved, rendering the analyst and analysed intimate, in that the excitement and sensationalism terrorists aim to generate also become central to media and

terrorism experts.⁴⁸ Acts of terrorism, I submit, are different from their subsequent homogenized and nationalized narrative, which the media shapes and reproduces in harmony with the notion of how the nation state and its 'other' are imagined. Treason against, and loyalty to, the nation are constitutive of the practices of mediatized terrorism discourses.

One may object to my argument that it is too generalizing as it ignores the differences of genres and senses—print, audiovisual, not to speak of differences in languages and regions. To this, I submit an observation from *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844*: 'The formation (*bildung*) of five senses is the work of all previous history [and hence future].'⁴⁹

Methodology: A Theoretical Outline

The argument I pursue here requires a different methodology. If narrative, culture, and myth of the nation are central to media, mere content analysis or determining of minute-wise allocation of news items on certain channels will be insufficient. Language-specific analysis of the media too will not serve the purpose. Such an exercise will be daunting (it needs massive research infrastructure) because of the sheer number of 24-hour broadcast media. In 2008, there were 62,483 registered newspapers (in 101 languages),⁵⁰ 500 radio stations, and 450 television channels,⁵¹ 65 of them being news **(p.303)** channels in 2009.⁵² I am not against empirical research; but, following Russell⁵³ and Adorno,⁵⁴ I reject pure empiricism as an impediment to a non-positivist understanding of the human condition. Given that we live in the 'empiricist culture'⁵⁵ where numbers, polls, percentages dominate, my approach is significant. The reigning assumption that 'facts' are good things and we should amass them derails our attention from the idea that bare facts are no gateway to knowledge.

My argument entails that we resist equating visibility with vision, audibility with comprehension, for 'behind the growing visibility [of media] is a growing invisibility'.⁵⁶ I suggest an interpretative enterprise which asks: what do all these scattered 'facts' mean? Do they point towards an analytical framework? I am not fully sympathetic to such clichés that 'but reality is so complex'. Of course, it is. In short, my attempt is to demonstrate a thread that runs beneath the otherwise disjointed facts seldom independent of the lenses through which one reads them. Since culture and myth of the nation⁵⁷ are by definition trans-local and beyond the specifics of family, organization, region, language, class, and other sociological coordinates, we ought to examine the political culture and myth of the nation in their own right as they manifest themselves in multiple catalogues—verbal, visual, written. Clearly, my approach is oriented towards production by, rather **(p.304)** than the reception of, the media. In my view, there are limits to the 'dictatorship of the viewers/readers' approach.⁵⁸

So far, I have spelt out why I invoke Kafka. Next, I delineated the connection between nation, media, and terrorism by situating it, *inter alia*, in debates on globalization and introduced and elaborated my main argument. In the following part, I present the media's discussions of 'Islamic terrorism'. I begin with a synoptic account of terrorism and media in India.

Terrorism and Media: The Case of India

The history of terrorism in India is old.⁵⁹ In the early nineteenth century, thuggees were called terrorists.⁶⁰ A century later, the term 'revolutionary terrorists' emerged for those who executed terror against the British.⁶¹ Most Indians did/do not regard them 'terrorists', however; they are martyrs and freedom fighters as Nath's study of 'Revolutionary [Terrorist] Movement in Bihar from 1902 to 1935'⁶² (p.305) suggests. During most of the postcolonial India experience, the term terrorists remained on the margin except perhaps in the case of Punjab and Kashmir.⁶³ Acts of violence by one set of non-state actors against another were seldom explained in terms of terrorism: they were 'riots'. Naxalites and Maoists—who targeted the state—were not called terrorists. Even about Kashmir and Punjab, more frequent terms were 'separatists', 'extremists', and 'militants'. About Punjab, Indian social scientists used terms like 'militant' and 'communal'.⁶⁴ The term 'terrorist' came to be applied to Naxalites much after 9/11 by the Indian state and media.⁶⁵ The 1990s inaugurated a marked shift in media discourses when the term terrorism assumed currency. With 9/11, it became ubiquitous; after what the West called 'India's 9/11',⁶⁶ the gruesome 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, it became inevitable. Ten days after the attack, John McCain, baptized the attack 'India's 9/11'.^{67,68} With minor qualifications, this phenomenon of terrorism is understood as Islamic terrorism, subsuming a variety of conflicts such as those in Kashmir which previously was (p.306) considered sub-national.⁶⁹ In media, terrorism is thus synonymous with the adjective Islamic. It is this specific terrorism that I write about here.

A word about the media and Hindu nationalism is in order here. The visibility of Hindu nationalism and the transformation of the media are almost simultaneous.⁷⁰ Without going into the nature of the link between the media and Hindu nationalism,⁷¹ the mainstream media has rarely used 'terrorism' to describe anti-Muslim violence by a variety of Hindu nationalists. Even the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim violence in which over 2,000 Muslims were killed⁷²—with absolute complicity of the state—was referred to as 'riots'.⁷³ The absence of 'terrorism' to describe state violence is a historical amnesia; in eighteenth-century France this term was deployed precisely to designate state terror: 'a terror of arbitrary government'.⁷⁴ Such was the case in British India too. After the suppression of the 1857 uprising, a colonial officer wrote that the summary execution of 'such men [Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar's sons] will strike terror, and produce a salutary fear through (p.307) the Mohammedan

population'.⁷⁵ Another feature of the post-9/11 media discourses on terrorism is its portrayal primarily as a *religious* phenomenon.⁷⁶

Manufacturing 'Moderate' and 'Fundamentalist' Muslims: The NDTV Talk Show

On 21 October 2001, NDTV⁷⁷—a leading English television channel—ran a talk show on Muslims and terrorism.⁷⁸ I have chosen this show because the English media (unlike media in Hindi or Gujarati which have 'bias and prejudice' against Muslims) are generally considered 'national' and 'liberal'.⁷⁹ Many also regard NDTV as left-oriented and a symbol of media liberalism. For instance, as a Delhi-based television journalist told me, unlike in the offices of other television channels, a Muslim employee of NDTV is allowed to eat his/her non-vegetarian lunch in its canteen. Since this chapter is about anti-Muslim biases in mainstream media, including the 'liberal' English media, I will focus on NDTV rather than comfortably choose, for example, Zee TV, which, according to the Secretary of the Press Club of India, is close to the right.

It is important to contextualize the NDTV show. Only two weeks after 9/11, the Indian government, on 27 September, had banned SIMI for fomenting 'communal disharmony' and 'sedition', declaring **(p.308)** it a 'fundamentalist' organization having links with 'Pakistan's ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence], terrorist groups' in Kashmir, and also 'Osama bin Laden's terrorist outfit Al Qaeda'.⁸⁰ Established in 1976 in Aligarh, SIMI was ideologically close to Jamaat-e-Islami Hind.⁸¹ Earlier, L.K. Advani, the then home minister, had anticipated the ban, describing SIMI's activities as 'anti-India'.⁸² The United States-led war on terror had given BJP an excuse to ban SIMI. The changed global scenario seemed to promote a competition for victimhood. The BJP sought to impress upon the United States that it had been facing 'Islamic terrorism' long before America became its target. The West-led war against Afghanistan, dubbed 'operation 'infinite justice',⁸³ had thus found echoes in the Indian government's hunt for terrorists. Following the ban, a crackdown on SIMI ensued. Hardly a day passed when the media did not run stories on 'terrorists'. The media also began to portray Aligarh Muslim University as a breeding ground for terrorism because SIMI was headquartered there till the early 1980s. Islamic seminaries (madrasas) had also come under the government's watch. The US war on terror, its bombing of Afghanistan, the ban on SIMI, and the media's nationalist sensationalism had generated a climate of fear among Muslims.⁸⁴ Such was the context of the NDTV talk show.

Titled 'The Indian Muslim Voice', the show was held in NDTV's auditorium with an audience of about a hundred, and was anchored by the bilingual, suave Barkha Dutt. In the middle front row were shown five veiled women: two in white and one each in sky-blue, grey, and black burqa. Bukhari, the Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, participated through telephone. Dutt introduced the show as follows:

(p.309) Hello and welcome.... America's war against Afghanistan is now entering its third week. But on the sideline has been the conflict of another kind: a conflict within the Arab world and the Muslim community. The media, especially Western networks, have been accused of playing up only the inflammatory images, of concentrating too much on what has been called the fringe element. Is that really true? *Is the moderate and silent majority getting crushed somewhere in the midst of all these noise?* We are going to take a hard look at that question today.⁸⁵

The framing of the show by Dutt was revealing. The issue was not if America's war on Afghanistan was legal and moral. Nor was the stand of the Indian government, which offered (unasked) the United States 'airspace, intelligence, and even military support'⁸⁶ for 'war against civilization' (declined, to India's dismay, by the United States, which befriended Pakistan), and its subordination to the West's imperial impulse against a Third World country. These issues were beyond question. For Dutt the question was if there were 'moderate' Muslims opposing terrorism. With such a framing, Dutt launched the debate: 'Let me start with one of India's most vocal women *who also happen[s] to be a Muslim*: Shabana Azmi'. Azmi, also a former member of parliament (MP), contra the veiled women in the front row, wore trimmed hair with a glaring bindi on her forehead. This symbol is pertinent. After 9/11, as some Indian women were attacked in the United States on the assumption of being Muslims, the Indian embassy emailed its residents asking them to wear a bindi⁸⁷ to let Americans know that they were Hindus, not Muslims.⁸⁸ **(p.310)**

As will become clear, the entire show was a classic illustration of media and politics as permanent performance and spectacle⁸⁹ geared towards **(p.311)** manufacturing the dualistic categories of 'moderate' and 'fundamentalist' Muslims. To this end, the NDTV show depicted Azmi as a representative of the former and Bukhari as a quintessential symbol of the latter. Based on a prior conversation with Azmi, Dutt told the audience that Azmi held that 'moderate voices' were being sidelined. In agreement, Azmi began by 'an unequivocal condemnation' of 9/11 and the subsequent polarization of the world, stressing that the 'pan-Islamic ummah' was a myth because Islam in some places had a 'moderate', in others 'reformist', 'fundamentalist', 'conservative' voice. The focus on 'only the fundamentalist ... voice', she continued, made 'Islam synonymous with terrorism' because of people like Bukhari, who, she held, had called for 'jihad which should be condemned in the strongest terms possible'. Azmi's, as also Dutt's (and by extension liberals' at large) target were the fundamentalists, Bukhari in particular. But the Imam was still unavailable. When the telephonic link with him was established, Dutt pointedly asked him:

Dutt: Do you justify what happened on 11 September?

Bukhari: What happened on 11 September, first, America will have to clarify if it repents its own terrorism committed throughout the world, its treatment of Muslims worldwide, its support of Israel, and the ongoing massacre of Palestinian Muslims.

Dutt: The issues you raise are utterly separate. Do you condemn terrorism: yes, or no?

Bukhari: Islam is absolutely against terrorism. Islam and terrorism can never coexist. America has devised a planned propaganda of



Figure 14.2 Photos from the NDTV Talk Show 'The Indian Muslim Voice' Telecast in 2001

Source: Photos taken by the author.

Islamic terrorism as a conspiracy. There is nothing called Islamic terrorism. Terrorism is terrorism. Before making allegations against others, America should see its own terrorism first. On 11 September George Bush himself had used the term 'crusade' against Islamic terrorism.

Dutt: Are you defending Osama bin Laden?

Bukhari: Absolutely, Osama bin Laden is not guilty (*mujrim*) until evidence is presented in front of the world. Without evidence, none becomes guilty simply because America dubs him so.

[A mood of discomfort in auditorium.]

Perhaps almost frustrated at not exactly hearing what she expected, Dutt gave the floor to Azmi (but why her amongst the hundred of the audience?).

(p.312) *Azmi*: You have asked Indian Muslims to prepare for jihad, why don't you yourself go to Kandahar to do your jihad?

[Loud applause from the audience; veiled women did not clap.]

Bukhari: I know at whose behest you are asking this question. I don't want to reply to questions posed by dancing-singing women (*naāchne gaāne valī īavaā'foñ*).

Azmi: I am very happy that you said that.

[Murmuring in the audience.]

At this point, on behalf of the audience Dutt, anguished, said that what Bukhari said was 'in bad taste'. She suggested that he apologize. Bukhari refused adding that 'those who made such allegations against me should be responded to this way only'. Soon, Azmi intervened:

Azmi: You people don't protest. Now it is crystal who is speaking in which language: who is speaking in the language of madness (*paāgalpan*) and who is speaking in the language of sanity. It is a good thing that he said so. I am very happy.

[Applause.]

Dutt: I am going to cut off the phone line here because this conversation is going to degenerate otherwise.

Bukhari: In Islam jihad is necessary for the protection of religion, life, property, and dignity of Muslims. And we have called for ethical support [against the West's bombing of Afghanistan]. Whoever is subjected to oppression has received and will receive our ethical support.

[Bukhari was not allowed to continue.]

Dutt: Thank you very much. We will have to leave it there.

With the telephone line cut, Dutt and her audience concluded that what Bukhari said was 'in bad taste'. Dutt reiterated: 'It was absolutely in bad taste.' But what did Bukhari say that was in 'bad taste'? To some, such as one of the anonymous reviewers of this chapter, it was Bukhari's description of Azmi as *nāchne gāne valī ṭavā'foñ*. Clearly, this description is deeply moral-religious. Evidently,

Bukhari didn't approve Azmi's profession; for such phrases in Hindi/Urdu are also deployed to connote one's profession. However, neither the anonymous reviewer nor Dutt ever noticed, much less found it objectionable, Azmi's description of Bukhari's language as **(p.313)** a language of madness and her own as language of sanity. In the liberal Enlightenment discourse from Kant to Habermas (as well as of Azmi and Dutt) nothing is more objectionable and obscene than describing some one as mad or insane for he/she is devoid of reason, the God of Enlightenment. Contra Bukhari's description of Azmi, Azmi's description of Bukhari leaves no room for a conversation because in the Liberal Enlightenment discourse conversation is not possible with someone insane. To the audience what was more objectionable was their assumption that Bukhari supported terrorism, as evident from the comment by another 'moderate' Muslim woman, 'How can we say that we condemn terrorism and at the same time we don't; we can't say this double-face talk.' But did Bukhari approve terrorism? Let's recall his words: 'Islam is absolutely against terrorism. Islam and terrorism can never coexist.' As if this statement was not categorical, in pursuit of finding 'moderate' Muslims by inventing 'fundamentalist' Muslims, Dutt reframed her question to ask if Bukhari supported bin Laden. Bukhari's response that he 'is not guilty until evidence is presented in front of the world' and that 'without evidence, none becomes guilty simply because America dubs him so' in no way demonstrated his support for terrorism. As elementary principles of law, evidence and fair trial are indispensable to pronouncing anyone guilty, certainly before bombing Afghanistan, which was the case at the time of the talk show. Let us note that the aims and justifications of the West's war on Afghanistan kept changing, from the surrender of bin Laden, toppling of the Taliban, to women's liberation.⁹⁰ Bukhari's twin points concerning law were also important to Chomsky, based on which he averred that the Afghan war was 'totally illegal ... criminal'.⁹¹ Does his view make Chomsky a fundamentalist, and not a moderate? For my argument, what is more important is not what Bukhari said **(p.314)** but the questions (and the unstated premises behind them) self-proclaimed liberals such as Dutt and Azmi posed to him. Leaving aside that such a question was seldom posed to any other community and the symbolic violence it contained, it is worth noting the premise of Dutt throughout the show. She continued to assume that Muslims supported terrorism. She failed to see the issue beyond the dualistic categories of 'moderate' and 'fundamentalist'. Halfway through the show, one of the veiled women remarked that since 'the Quran does not label them [Muslims] as 'conservative, liberal, or moderate Muslims', these categories look like 'a conspiracy to divide the Muslims on liberal, moderate, or conservative line'. Dutt quickly diverted her and asked in a low, sympathetic voice: 'As a woman are you concerned about how, you must have heard, women are being treated under the Taliban regime?' She replied: 'I have heard and definitely that is to be condemned.' Describing the treatment of women by Taliban as 'their internal affair' she added that it 'cannot be done by just bombing them out; the richest nation of the world bombing the poorest

nation. And how do we call them terrorists?.... So the America can bomb anyone?' Dutt again interrupted her and asked bluntly: 'Do you condemn the World Trade Centre attack?' 'Definitely,' she replied, and continued her observation. But Dutt, having discovered the answer, was no longer interested in what she further thought. The line between debate and interrogation appeared thin.

Dutt's premise of Muslims supporting terrorism again became bare when another veiled woman opined that Allah gave us 'the right to protest against the misdeeds' and that 'we can not be ... mute viewers'. 'If we have the right then we should use it,' she continued, 'whether it is Afghanistan or America or any big power of the world.' Cutting her short, Dutt asked: 'But not terrorists?'

Veiled woman: Of course, of course, against terrorism also.

Dutt: Against terrorism? Not supporting terrorism?

Veiled woman: Not supporting.

Towards the show's end, Dutt gave the floor to Azmi to say the final words. Disregarding the complex viewpoints raised by others, for instance, the two veiled women, she returned to her pet theme of dualism asking 'who really represents the Muslims—is it the moderate or is it the conservative?' She called Imam Bukhari 'conservative' and (p.315) 'communal', someone who did not address the 'real issues' such as bread, clothing, housing, and health, which, she held, were raised by 'moderate' Muslims like herself. At stake here is not the 'fact' that Bukhari and 'communal', 'conservative' Muslims did not address the 'real issues' and only 'moderate' Muslims did (both claims are only partially true). Far more important, in the looming shadow of post-9/11, is the embracing and reproduction of the dualistic categories of moderate and fundamentalist Muslims by Azmi and its telecast to the nation which sought to position itself in relation to the changed global politics of terrorism.

From my analysis of the NDTV show anchored by Barkha Dutt, it is fairly clear, I hope, how the dualistic categories of 'moderate' and 'fundamentalist' were fashioned and sustained even as the evidence and interventions by some participants defied those very categories. If we read and listen to each and every word Bukhari said, in no way did he support terrorism. Nor did he defend bin Laden. His point was about the elementary principle of law, which requires evidence before pronouncing anyone guilty. All these nuances were erased to depict him as a supporter of terrorism. The abstract for the show on the NDTV website said (and says, when accessed on 25 September 2012, <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/new/wethepeople.aspx?id=196623#vidplay>) that Bukhari 'defended bin Laden, called for jihad'. That Azmi called Bukhari's language as 'language of madness' is simply erased from the abstract by not mentioning it. Furthermore, the abstract took as given the 'assertion that Islam

is synonymous with terrorism'; the question NDTV asked was: 'But are Muslim preachers [undefined] the real reason behind this assumption?' Not surprisingly, as I documented above, the show throughout assumed that Muslims supported terrorism. That was why Dutt kept interrogating Bukhari by asking the same question differently. In the case of two veiled women, despite their clarifications, Dutt asked them again and again if they supported terrorism. More importantly, when issues of international politics, global hegemony, and oppression were raised by the 'fundamentalists'—Bukhari and the two veiled women—Dutt rejected them outright. To Bukhari, she said: 'The issues you raise are utterly separate.' By focusing on the 'moderate' and 'conservative', and deftly skirting the issues of Western hegemony and India's subordination to imperial dictates with no sympathy for an impoverished country like Afghanistan under attack, the show exemplified what **(p.316)** Mamdani⁹² fittingly terms 'culture talk' to produce and distinguish 'good Muslims' from 'bad Muslims'. This case study of the NDTV show does not merely demonstrate the media's bias against Muslims, but also its form, modality, and complexity. Introducing the show, Dutt promised: 'We are going to *take a hard look* at that question today.' My analysis shows that she *hardly* took a *look* at the question, prejudiced as it was from the start.

The 'Terrorists'—SIMI and IM: The Visible and the Invisible

According to the Indian government and media, of the groups involved in terrorism, two stand out: SIMI and IM, a group believed to have been formed after 2001 and described by *India Today* as 'India's Al Qaeda'.⁹³ SIMI and IM have been charged with several attacks. Here I discuss their alleged involvement in the terrorist attack in Mumbai on 13 July 2011. The police said that IM and SIMI were behind the attack. Officers from National Intelligence Agency raided the houses of two IM suspects in Ranchi: Danish Rayaz and Manzar Imam.⁹⁴ The police also arrested many from Mumbai's 'sensitive' (Muslim) areas, a practice Mumbai's Muslims have grown accustomed to in the last decade.⁹⁵ One arrested IM suspect, Faiz Usmani, died in police custody. The police claimed that his death was caused by 'hypertension'; his family believed that he was tortured to death.⁹⁶ Usmani's brother, **(p.317)** in jail for his alleged involvement in the 2008 Ahmedabad blast, was also reportedly an IM operative.

Riaz Bhatkal, described as India's 'most wanted terrorist', is regarded as IM's founder. But very little credible information—much is based on the state and intelligence sources—is available either about him or IM's history. What also remains unknown is if Bhatkal is alive or dead. After the 13 July blast, the police resolved to nab him.⁹⁷ This is surprising because in early 2011 the media had reported that Bhatkal was killed in Karachi by Chhota Rajan, Mumbai's underworld don.⁹⁸

The media offer differing accounts of IM's formation. Sometimes inconsistency is stark within a single version. For example, Animesh Roul, the Director of the Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict in Delhi, claimed that IM was

‘conceived at a terrorist conclave attended by top leaders of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami (HuJI) in Pakistani-administered Kashmir in May 2008’.⁹⁹ He did not find it contradictory when in the next paragraph he wrote, ‘IM came into the open for the first time in November 2007’. Christine Fair¹⁰⁰ indicated two dates of its formation: 2001 and an ambiguous date of ‘much later’. According to the *Times of India*,¹⁰¹ IM was formed **(p.318)** in 2005. To Namrata Goswami of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Delhi ‘key SIMI members ... started supporting the idea of the formation of the IM as early as December 2007’.¹⁰²

It is clear that these dates of IM’s formations given by the media and terrorism experts vastly vary. It is worth noting that since 2001 far more people have been arrested as ‘SIMI-IM terrorists’ than the actual number of SIMI members which in 1996 was 413 (when founded in 1976, SIMI’s members numbered 132¹⁰³). Until today the Indian government has not proved its rationale for banning SIMI. Since 2001, when SIMI was banned, three tribunals (constituted under a high court judge) have upheld the ban (valid for two years after which the tribunal has to either renew or cancel it). The fourth time the tribunal nullified the ban. Hours after the nullification, the central government appealed to the Supreme Court, which passed a stay order on the tribunal judgment the same day. Without going into the legal complexity of this case, let me provide a sense of the tribunal’s working. When SIMI advocate, Jawahar Raja, argued that SIMI was not responsible for the alleged terrorism, the judge asked: ‘Mr. Raja, you say that SIMI is not doing this, if you are not doing this, then who is [doing it]?’¹⁰⁴ The extent to which the judges might be under extra-legal pressure was evident in the Supreme Court judgment relating to the 2001 Indian Parliament attack. Many television channels conducted SMS polls whether Afzal Guru should be hanged for his involvement in the attack.¹⁰⁵ The court said: ‘The collective conscience of the society will only be satisfied if the capital punishment is awarded to the offender.’¹⁰⁶ Only a few years later the same Supreme Court, however, dismissed a petition demanding a judicial inquiry into what many regarded as a fake police encounter leading to the killing of two young **(p.319)** innocent Muslim ‘terrorists’ in Delhi’s Batla House on the ground that it ‘will adversely affect the morale of the police’.¹⁰⁷

Returning to IM, it first hit the headlines after a series of explosions in November 2007. In an email to media, IM claimed responsibility for the blasts. As the email explained, the aim of those attacks was to protest against ‘the pathetic conditions of Muslims in India that idol worshippers can kill our brothers, sisters, children and outrage dignity of our sisters at any place and at any time and we can’t resist them’.¹⁰⁸ The destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu nationalists is important to IM’s ideological repertoire—hence its description by the media as a ‘home-grown’, ‘domestic’ terror outfit. However, many security experts hold that IM is a tool of Pakistan’s ISI to destabilize India. In these accounts, IM is a means to advance ISI’s agenda of destabilizing India

and at the same time exonerate Pakistan of any allegation by India and the West of promoting terrorism. The logic of the security experts is that the word 'Indian' in IM points to India's domestic groups rather than Pakistani groups like LeT through which the ISI has been operating in Kashmir. Experts like B. Raman, however, extend IM's and SIMI's parameters beyond South Asia to characterize it as a part of global Islamic radicalism, with concerns about the United States-led war in Iraq and praise for Osama bin Laden.¹⁰⁹

The media bases its stories on state sources. Consider the writings of Praveen Swami, a terrorism expert that almost everyone writing on IM cites. Swami¹¹⁰ reproduces the police version without giving the other side of the story: what are the views of the alleged terrorists, their family members, or Muslim community. It is well known **(p.320)** that the police are biased against Muslims and have been complicit in killing them, as evident in the state-engineered 2002 massacre of Muslims in Gujarat.¹¹¹

Given that the media is uninterested in reporting 'facts' and alternative views, can an anthropologist like me make sense of the mediatized world of terrorism? Eriksen holds that a concept like globalization has 'no meaning to an anthropologist unless it can be studied through actual persons, their relationship to each other and to a larger surrounding world'.¹¹² In rendering itself visible, the media in fact make other things invisible. What rarely is visible in media are the brutal, illegal methods used against suspected terrorists: torture cells, illegal detention, unlawful killings in 'police encounters', elimination of evidence against illegal actions of the law-enforcing agencies, and rampant harassment of Muslims. In July 2009, *The Week* reported on the existence of at least 15 secret torture chambers meant to extract information from detainees. The methods to extract information included attaching electrodes to a detainee's genitals and switching on electrical power, as well as the use of pethidine injections. To quote *The Week*, these chambers are 'our own little Guantanamo Bays or Gitmos', which a top policeman called 'precious assets'.¹¹³

In May 2008, a Muslim boy, aged 14, was abducted by the Gujarat police. At pistol's point, he was taken to a detention centre where he was tortured. He returned home 10 days later when the court ordered his release following his mother's petition. The police subsequently threatened the boy's family with dire consequences if it pursued the case in a court.¹¹⁴ After the Sabarmati train burning case in 2002 (in **(p.321)** which 59 Kar Sevaks returning from Ayodhya were killed), scores of Muslims were arrested in Gujarat. Of these, at the time of their arrest, Mohammad Shaaqir was 14 years old, Irfan 15, and Abdul Qalandar 17. While Irfan, charged under Section 432 of the Indian Penal Code, was released five weeks later, Shaaqir and Qalandar, charged under POTA, spent nine years in prison and were released in February 2010 when the special court in Ahmedabad acquitted 63 of the accused and convicted another 31.¹¹⁵ Maulvi Yaqoob Panjabi, charged with chanting provocative slogans from the top of a

mosque to incite Muslims when the train halted at Godhra was not even in the country; his passport showed that he was out of India when the incident took place.¹¹⁶

(T)reason and Culture: The Very Symbols

On 13 July 2011, only two days after the Mumbai blast, Subramanian Swamy, a former minister of the central government (with a doctorate from Harvard University) wrote an article called 'How to Wipe out Islamic Terror'. Without any evidence, he blamed Muslims for the attack in the same way as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic*, and the *Sun* suspected a Muslim hand behind the Norway shooting nine days after it occurred.¹¹⁷ Swamy wrote: 'We need a collective mindset as Hindus to stand against the Islamic terrorist. The Muslims of India can join us if they genuinely feel for the Hindus. That they do I will not believe unless they acknowledge with pride that though they may be Muslims, their ancestors were Hindus'. (p.322) Those refusing to acknowledge this, Swamy urged, 'should not have voting rights'. He proposed declaring India 'a Hindu Rashtra [state]'.¹¹⁸

What Swamy did is almost standard practice in the Indian media. In September 2006, a blast killed 35 people at a Muslim graveyard in Malegaon. Nearly all media blamed Muslims. Likewise in 2007, after the blast that killed 10 worshippers in Hyderabad's Mecca mosque, Praveen Swami freely wrote about the Muslim terrorists who caused it.

What the Mecca Masjid bombings—as well as other strikes] that have been prevented—make clear is that the *Islamist threat to India's cities remains in place....* Under intense pressure from the United States and Europe, Pakistan has been compelled to rein in the Lashkar-e-Taiba. *Attacks on mosques, Islamist terror groups appear to hope, will be blamed on Hindu fundamentalist organizations—and thus provide the pretext they need to throw off the shackle.*

It is also one of the sets for a story Hyderabad does not care to advertise: as one of the neighbourhoods that helped give birth to the Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami's (HuJI) operations in *Hyderabad, a city that has a unique significance for the Islamists engaged in the long jihad against India*.¹¹⁹

Much against Swami's wish, investigations later showed that Hindu nationalists/terrorists enacted the Malegaon and Mecca masjid terror attacks. However, this did not deter analysts like him from naming Muslims as quislings of the nation. Three years later, Swami wrote:

Many in India's intelligence services fear that the recent bombings in Pune in February 2010, Bangalore in April 2010 ... Hyderabad in May 2010 herald the coming of a renewed wave of *jihadist violence intended to undermine the country's economic progress and status in the run-up to the*

*high-profile Commonwealth Games, which will be held in New Delhi in October 2010.... [T]he country clearly faces a growing problem from Indian Muslims who have become radicalized and are able to seek assistance from Pakistan-based militants.*¹²⁰

In subtle forms, views like Subramanian Swamy's and Praveen Swami's inform analyses by many 'liberal' intellectuals and media analysts. The **(p.323)** police and civil authorities are no exception as the stories of the arrested and subsequently released Muslim youths show. After the Mecca masjid blast in Hyderabad in 2007, Abdur Raheem, an auto rickshaw driver, was arrested from his home. In a video interview with *TCN*,¹²¹ he described how for four days he was kept in illegal detention and tortured to confess that he was responsible for the blast. Later, he was sent to jail and kept there for five months. Mohammad Rayees, another resident of Hyderabad, was abducted by the police on his way from his shop to his home. After being kept in illegal detention for eight days and tortured to confess that he caused the Mecca mosque blast, he was jailed for six months. When his parents went to see him, the prison authorities told them that they would be allowed to see their son if they wrote in the register that he was an ISI agent. Both Raheem and Rayees were told by the police that the only way they could be let free and live was to confess the crime they had not committed. (*"Mecca masjid blast qubūl kar lo ke kam se kam zinda to rah jāoge"*).¹²²

Aftab Alam, a young Muslim from Uttar Pradesh working in Kolkata was arrested in December 2007 by the Uttar Pradesh police. Alam was arrested after the multiple blasts in Uttar Pradesh in November 2007. On the day of the blast he was, however, in his office as his attendance sheet showed. After his arrest, he was taken to an unknown place where he was told that he was 'an area commander of HuJI' and that the 'bomb blasts were conspired by him'. Alam was brutally beaten to confess that his real name was Mukhtar alias Raju from Bangladesh. After three weeks of torture at the headquarters of Special Task Force, on 17 January 2008, when he was set free, one constable told Alam that he was released because he 'did not know Urdu properly and did not have a beard either'.¹²³

The stigmatizations of Muslims' cultural markers and their identification with terrorism by the police were not limited to north India, however. In the south, in early 2008, the police arrested many educated **(p.324)** Muslim youths in Karnataka. As a report¹²⁴ by some critical, marginalized journalists showed, the state media—English and Kannada—reported these cases with ample prejudice, stigmatizing the Muslim community at large. The *Times of India* (on whose logo is inscribed 'Let Truth Prevail') ran stories titled 'Terror Suspects Were Out to Target Southern India', 'Second Terror Camp Unearthed', 'Terror Camps, Pak Flags in Karnataka Jungles'. The *Hindu* titled its story 'Jihad in Cyber City'. The *Indian Express* (whose logo reads 'Journalism of Courage') titled one of its

stories 'Ghouse Refused to Sing National Anthem' and thus he 'showed his hostility to India'.¹²⁵ In Bangalore, when the house of Salahuddin was raided by detectives (and 30 policemen), a policeman threatened: 'You also have a beard. You know what we want.' A Kannada television channel showed not only the house where Yahya, a suspected SIMI terrorist, lived but also the mosque in the neighbourhood.¹²⁶ When the Column Nine team asked journalists on what grounds they termed the books seized from the terrorists as 'jihadi materials', they said because they were in Urdu (which they could not read).¹²⁷ In 2010, when a Muslim journalist, K.K. Shahina went to interview two eyewitnesses of the 2008 Bengaluru blast in Hassan district (whose accounts contradicted police's), she was intimidated by the police who asked her: 'Are you a terrorist?' A day after, Kannada newspapers (*Sakthi*, *Prajavani*, *Kannada Prabha*) ran stories about a 'suspicious' visit by 'a group of Muslims'. The police in fact filed a case against Shahina, accusing her of intimidating the witnesses.¹²⁸

(p.325) Let me end with a counter narrative, which remains on the margin of the nation and its mediatized myth. This story was told to a People's Tribunal on terrorism in August 2008 in Hyderabad.

I am Azil Parvaz.... Two of my brothers had been arrested ... Amil Parvaz is in Indore jail while ... Gadil Parvaz is in a jail near Unhel. Amil was a SIMI member before it was banned in 2001, related to which he had already been fighting a case since 1999. On March 24, 2008 he had gone for the hearing of the same case, but did not return home. After 2-3 days we read in a newspaper that Amil Parvaz as well as Safdar Nagori, Qamruddin Nagori, Kamran, Shibli etc. had been arrested ... from Gulzar colony, Indore.... For the first seven days of remand, they were not even allowed to sleep; the interrogation would go on all night and they were given brutal physical torture.... Then they were sent for a Narco test.... *The newspaper was the only medium for us to get any information about him.*

On March 30, 2008 ... Gadil Parvaz was arrested.... The ... police ... pelted stones and knocked wildly at the door.... They also ... took away our books; my mobile was also taken and was later produced in court as Gadil's. Gadil was ... sent in remand for seven days. He was beaten brutally ... his four friends were also arrested.... *When the police went to the fields to investigate the matter; to look for bullet marks, pits where arms and ammunition were supposed to be kept, they could not find even one. But the police got it published in the local newspapers that there was a training camp... for... terrorists.*

Amil ... was also charged ... in a conspiracy to take revenge for the Gujarat riots by blowing up top leaders of the BJP.... It was alleged that he also had one training centre in Chaural ... therefore a case was registered against Amil Parvaz, Safdar Nagori, Qamruddin Nagori stating that, arms,

ammunitions and some Urdu literature was seized from them. When all three of them ... said that if such illegal things had been found then why were they not allowed to identify them. In response, *the IB officials said that the matter had been exposed so much in the media that it made it difficult for the investigating agencies to detach themselves from the case and hence they had to remain in captivity* ... during the remand, Gadil was given electric shocks on his private parts ... *He was told that he was pro-Pakistan, and that if he had to live in India he would have to recite the Vande-Maatram....*

They are still in jail.... No one till date has been granted bail. Earlier ... we had a lawyer to fight Gadil's case. But ... *Noor Mohammed Sahib, who was the lawyer in Amil's case, had been beaten many times in court (p.326) by fellow lawyers and, BJP and VHP activists....* We could not get any other lawyer....¹²⁹

My 80 year old father is a heart patient.... My mother is diabetic.... Amil's wife ... was also booked.... She was accused of running a women's wing named Shaheen. She has been shown as absconding, but she is actually staying with her parents because otherwise she could be caught any time. *I am under a lot of mental pressure ... I alone have to follow their cases and the responsibility of my entire family is also on my shoulders....* I am receiving news that the police are planning to put me behind bars too.

Every other day my photograph or Amil's photograph is published in the Dainik Sahara.... Even Muslims in Unhel think that we are terrorists.... They fear being caught by the police, and accused of being SIMI activists. This is the whole scenario and I request all those sitting here to help us to get rid of these charges.¹³⁰

There is a tendency to write 'media and terrorism', 'media and religion', and 'media and nation' as if they were two neatly separate entities. In Hent de Vries' reading,¹³¹ Manuel Castells' trilogy, *The Information Age* illustrates this tendency, for he assumes that with the onset of the information society, religion plays a reactionary role. The new communication system (media) is thus one thing and religion another. My submission is that to see media and terrorism, and media and nation as tidily distinct spheres is less than helpful, in fact misleading. In questioning this separation, I have made the nation **(p.327)** state central to my analysis because the nation, as Derrida observes, 'form[s] the historical body of all religious passions'.¹³² In this chapter, my key contention has been that any understanding of terrorism and media requires and presupposes a notion of the nation and its 'other' as enshrined in the dominant myth of the nation. Thus, to speak of the media is at once to speak of the nation

as religion and religion as nation. By according salience to the nation, my analysis does not disregard supranational and global forces; on the contrary, I have showed how the Indian media adapted global discourses on terrorism to craft a narrative externally vis-à-vis the West and the region (South Asia) and internally vis-à-vis Muslims who, since 9/11, are often regarded as supporters, advocates, and practitioners of terrorism. It is because of this assumption that even the explosions and killings of Muslims in Hyderabad's mosque and Malegaon's graveyard were attributed to 'Muslim terrorists' by the mainstream media. When *Tehelka* journalist, K.K. Shahina questioned such an assumption, she herself was branded as a 'terrorist' by the police. Karnataka's media—notably Kannada newspapers—ran stories describing her work as 'suspicious' and specifically mentioning her 'Muslim' identity (not her identity as a journalist). Thus seen, the media's print and visual regimes may be better understood as performance and spectacle rather than political in a conventional sense. This is equally—nay, more—true of television despite the premise of it showing reality 'live'. Recalling the house where the suspected SIMI terrorist, Yahya, lived, as well as the mosque in Yahya's neighbourhood telecast by a Kannada television channel, read this observation Derrida makes in 'Above All, No Journalists!':

No one knows very well—and this is the most rudimentary knowledge concerning what television is in reality—that *there is never anything live*. All of that is *produced* ... in a fraction of second, in studios where one can instantaneously frame, efface, reconstruct, manipulate.... The presumption remains, and with it, the common prejudice, the structural credulity that television, by contrast with printed newspapers and radio, allows you to see the thing itself ... with the Evangelical dimensions.¹³³

(p.328) Based on the case study of the NDTV talk show, and an analysis of diverse forms of media's reporting on and depiction of SIMI and IM—the two most-discussed terrorist outfits in post-9/11 India—I have argued that mainstream media discourses on terrorism are intimately tied to the myth and narrative of the Indian nation state and its constitutive 'other', namely Muslims. From the dense description I have presented, it follows that the discourses and practices of the media and terrorism are not autonomous—as the liberal understanding has it that the media is part of the civil society—they are instead intensely shaped by and reproduce the imaginations and myth of the nation state and its 'other'. I am aware of the diversity of media along the lines of language, region, genres, and so on. However, in mainstream media discourses on terrorism, this diversity becomes peripheral, if not inconsequential, because what is at stake is a specific type of terrorist threat to the nation which the media stages, vis-à-vis India's dream of being an emerging global power in simultaneous competition and cooperation with the West, as well the threat from within. My discussion of print and television media 'coverage' of Muslim terrorists in diverse places such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Delhi

and in different media such as Gujarati, Kannada, and English substantiates my point.

Since assumption of a prior myth is central to the media reporting on terrorism, it is unsurprising that inaccuracy, inconsistency, even contradiction appear in their reports. To reiterate, the media fits 'facts' of terrorism into a prior, violently hegemonic myth of nation. To this end, I have presented diverse and conflicting accounts of SIMI and IM by media as well as security experts who base their accounts on the former. I have also paid attention to Muslims' cultural markers—beard, Urdu, mosque, areas of dwelling—which inform and shape the definition of who a terrorist is. My larger point has been that terrorism is less a phenomenon of law and more of culture, which is understood in relation to the dominant myth of the nation and its 'other'. I have also discussed what remains mostly invisible in mainstream media—the repression of evidence, secret torture chambers, illegal means deployed against 'terrorists', and the accounts of family members of the arrested and tortured Muslim youths. It was for this reason that I quoted at length the narrative of Azil Parvaz, whose two brothers were jailed as 'terrorists', and who feared being arrested by the police.

(p.329) This dialectic of media's visibility and invisibility, the excitement and sensationalism that are common to both media and terrorists, and staging and recasting of nation's myth in a globalized world are some of the many important aspects of terrorism and media studies. This chapter is an attempt to unpack that dialectic as an important step in writing a comprehensive political anthropology of Muslims in post-independent India.

Notes:

(¹) To my knowledge, there is no accurate, official figure of Muslims arrested and imprisoned as 'terrorists'. Though anti-terrorism legislation such as Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1985 (TADA) existed, much like the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, India too passed a series of new laws soon after 9/11: Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (POTA) (issued first as a presidential decree in October 2001) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008. See All India Milli Council. 2012. *Document on Terrorism and Justice*. National Convention on Terrorism and Justice held on 27 April 2008, Delhi. <http://www.aimcnd.org/document.htm> visited 9 May 2012.; see also Manoj Mate and Adnan Naseemullah. 2010. 'State Security and Elite Capture: The Implementation of Antiterrorist Legislation in India', *Journal of Human Rights*, 9(3): 262–78. According to the Amnesty International report, from the date of its enactment until September 2006, over 3,500 people (including some minors) in 18 states were held under POTA. The state of Gujarat had the largest number of detainees, 287, of whom all, except one, were Muslim (All India Milli Council 2012). I don't know of figures since September 2006.

(²) Shabnam Hashmi (ed.). 2011. *What It Means To Be a Muslim in India Today: A Report of People's Tribunal on the Atrocities Committed against the Minorities in the Name of Fighting Terrorism*. New Delhi: Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD), p. 170.

(³) Conducted between November 2010 and February 2011, this fieldwork was part of my larger research titled, 'Religion, Nation-State and Liberalism: A Political Anthropology of Muslims in Post-colonial India', funded by Monash University under the 'New Fields of Research' scheme.

(⁴) Panu Minkkinen. 1994. 'The Radiance of Justice: On the Minor Jurisprudence of Franz Kafka', *Social and Legal Studies*, 3(3): 349–63; George Dargo. 2007. 'Reclaiming Franz Kafka, Doctor of Jurisprudence', *Brandeis Law Journal*, 45(3): 495–526.

(⁵) Walter H. Sokel. 1999. 'Kafka as a Jew', *New Literary History*, 30(4): 837–53.

(⁶) My recourse to Kafka is purposively limited. In one view (Dargo, 'Reclaiming Franz Kafka', p. 497), after Shakespeare, Kafka has invited the utmost attention in disciplines as diverse as critical theory, criminology, law, literature, politics, psychology, sociology, theology, music, theatre, film, and so on.

(⁷) Jacques Derrida. 2005. *Rouges: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

(⁸) Irfan Ahmad. 2011. 'The Categorical Revolution: Democratic Uprising in the Middle East', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(44–45): 30–5.

(⁹) Sally Falk Moore. 2005. 'Certainties Undone: Fifty Turbulent Years of Legal Anthropology, 1949–1999', in Sally Falk Moore (ed.), *Law and Anthropology: A Reader*, pp. 346–67. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

(¹⁰) Recall Abul Kalam Azad's (1888–1958) statement to a British court: 'In addition to the battlefields, the greatest injustice in the history of [the] world has taken place in the houses of justice [courts].' Abul Kalam Azad. 2003. *Qaul-e-faişal*. New Delhi: Farid Book Depot, p. 83.

(¹¹) Ather Farouqui (ed.). 2009. *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

(¹²) On the caste bias in the media, see Anita Dighe, 'Disenfranchised and Disempowered: How the Global Media Treat Their Audience - A Case from India', in Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler (eds), *The Handbook of Global Communication and Media Ethics*, pp. 517–33. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

- (¹³) Irfan Ahmad. 2011. 'The (In)Visible in Indian Terrorism'. *Al-Jazeera* (English). September 16. <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/09/2011912104910716820.html> (accessed on 20/09/2011).
- (¹⁴) Editorial. 2007. 'Challenge of Islamist Terror', *Hindu*, 15 October, available online at <http://www.hindu.com/2007/10/15/stories/2007101570251200.htm> (accessed on 5 March 2012).
- (¹⁵) Milli Gazette. 2011. 'IB Demons Are Out Again', *Milli Gazette*, 14 December, available online at <http://www.milligazette.com/news/2857-ib-demons-are-out-again> (accessed on 5 March 2012).
- (¹⁶) Dwaipayan Ghosh. 2011. 'North Bihar is the New Azamgarh, Says IB', *Times of India*, 4 December 2011, available online at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/North-Bihar-is-the-new-Azamgarh-says-IB/articleshow/10975581.cms> (accessed on 4 December 2011).
- (¹⁷) Asthanvi, Ashraf. 2012. 'Dahshatgardī ke naām par Nishaaāne per Musalmaān'. *Ālami sahaāraā*. 17 March. 34–36.; Mumtaz Alam Falahi. 2012. 'Bicycle Repair Mechanic for Darbhanga, IM Recruiter for Delhi Police', *TwoCircles.Net*, 10 March, available online at http://twocircles.net/2012mar10/bicycle_repair_mechanic_darbhanga_im_recruiter_delhi_police.html (accessed on 12 March 2012).
- (¹⁸) Arjun Appadurai. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Jean-Marie Guéhenno. 1995. *The End of the Nation-State*. Translated by Victoria Elliott. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Susan Strange. 2003. 'The Declining Authority of the States', in David Held and Anthony G. McGrew (eds), *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, 2nd rev. ed., pp. 127–34. Cambridge: Polity Press. Cf. Arjun Appadurai. 2006. *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press; Michael Mann. 2003. 'Has Globalization Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?', in David Held and Anthony G. McGrew (eds), *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, 2nd rev. ed., pp. 135–46. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (¹⁹) Liah Greenfeld. 2011. *Arena: The Australian Magazine of Left Political, Social and Cultural Commentary*, 110, p. 57.
- (²⁰) Silvio Waisbord. 2004. 'Media and the Reinvention of the Nation', in John D.H. Downing, Denis McQuail, Philip Schlesinger, and Ellen Wartella (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 375–92, see p. 375.
- (²¹) Benedict Anderson. 1991. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

(²²) Waisbord, 'Media and Reinvention', p. 376.

(²³) Terhi Rantanen. 2009. *When News Was New*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 92.

(²⁴) Rantanen, *When News Was New*, p. xiv.

(²⁵) Rantanen, *When News Was New*, p. 96.

(²⁶) Waisbord, 'Media and Reinvention', p. 375; see also Paschal Preston and Aphra Kerr. 2001. 'Digital Media, Nation-states and Local Cultures: The Case of Multimedia 'Content' Production', *Media, Culture, and Society*, 23(1):109–31.

(²⁷) Roger Silverstone. 1988. 'Television Myth and Culture', in James W. Carey (ed.), *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 20–47.

(²⁸) Jack Lule. 2001. *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*. New York: Guilford Press, p. 15.

(²⁹) Irfan Ahmad. 2009. *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 196.

(³⁰) Urs Dahinden, Carmen Koch, Vinzenz Wyss, and Guido Keel. 2011. 'Representation of Islam and Christianity in the Swiss Media', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 24(2): 197–208.

(³¹) Anthony Giddens. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

(³²) Silverstone, 'Television Myth and Culture', p. 23.

(³³) Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories*, p. 7.

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(³⁵) Stephanie Greco Larson. 2006. *Media and Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 21.

(³⁶) Vinod Mehta. 2009. 'Muslims and Media Images: Where Things Went Wrong', in Ather Farouqui (ed.), *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views*, pp. 25–35. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 25–35.

⁽³⁷⁾ Francis Fukuyama. 2002. 'Their Target: The Modern World', *Newsweek*, December 2001–January 2002, available online at <http://utenti.multimania.it/giocondar/Target.htm> (accessed on 6 August 2011).

⁽³⁸⁾ Chandan Mitra. 2009. 'The Print Media and Minority Images', in Ather Farouqui (ed.), *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 91–9.

⁽³⁹⁾ Kushanava Choudhury. 2000. 'An Idealistic World, and How to Get There', *The Daily Princetonian*, 8 May, available online at <http://www.dailyprincetonian.com/2000/05/08/978/> (accessed on 12 February 2012).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Rajni Kothari. 2009. 'Muslims and the Press: Some Reflections', in Ather Farouqui (ed.), *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 36–39.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Jeffrey's proposition that Urdu press awaits its Murdoch or Citizen Kane is interesting; however, it is oblivious to the larger myth which shapes the media. Contra Jeffrey, my argument relates to the non-Urdu press. Robin Jeffrey. 2009. 'Urdu Newspapers in India: Waiting for Citizen Kane?', in Ather Farouqui (ed.), *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 221–36.

⁽⁴²⁾ See 'Indian Muslims' Ideology [Islamic Terrorism]', available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsChhZltdfE> (accessed on 9 April 2009).

⁽⁴³⁾ Amrit Gangar. 2003. 'Tinseltown: From Studios to Industry', in Sujata Patel and Jim Masselos (eds), *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 267–300.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Larson, *Media and Minorities*.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Mahmood Mamdani. 2004. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York: Pantheon Books.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Larson, *Media and Minorities*, makes a similar point about racial minorities in the United States.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Walter Laqueur. 2001. *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 44–5. In terrorism studies, five 't's regarded as important are: technology (weapons and media), theology, territory, tactics and targeting, and theatre (search for audience); see Pamala L. Griset and Sue Mahan (eds). 2003. *Terrorism in Perspective*. London: SAGE Publications; Jordan Nelms. 2011. 'The Three Ts of Terrorism - Finding the Facts in the News', *Domestic Preparedness*, 16 February, available online at <http://www.domesticpreparedness.com/commentary/viewpoint/>

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(⁴⁸) Irfan Ahmad. 2010. 'Is There an Ethics of Terrorism? Islam, Globalisation, Militancy', *South Asia*, 33(3): 487-98.

(⁴⁹) Zahid R. Chaudhary. *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-century India*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 2.

(⁵⁰) Dighe, 'Disenfranchised and Disempowered', p. 517.

(⁵¹) Maya Ranganathan and Usha M. Rodrigues. 2010. 'Introduction', *Indian Media in a Globalised World*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, p. xi-ix; Daya Kishan Thussu. 2007. *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*. London: SAGE Publications.

(⁵²) Daya Thussu. 2009. 'Turning Terrorism into a Soap Opera', *British Journalism Review*, 20(1): 13-18, see p. 16.

(⁵³) Bertrand Russell. 1935-6. 'The Limits of Empiricism', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 36: 131-50.

(⁵⁴) Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (eds). 2002. *Adorno: A Critical Reader*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.

(⁵⁵) Silverstone, 'Television Myth and Culture', p. 27.

(⁵⁶) Peter van der Veer. 2010. 'The Visible and the Invisible in South Asia', in Marteen B. ter Borg and Jan Willem van Henten (eds), *Powers: Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force*, pp. 103-15. New York: Fordham University Press, p. 107.

(⁵⁷) On Germany, see Uli Linke. 1997. 'Gendered Difference, Violent Imagination: Blood, Race, Nation', *American Anthropologist*, 99(3): 559-73.

(⁵⁸) Robert M. Entman. 1993. 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, 43(4): 51-8; John R. Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(⁵⁹) Chānakya (b. 280 BC), advisor to the famous Indian ruler Chandraguptā, suggested many clandestine methods to subdue enemies through terror. In *Arthshāstra*, Chānakya (also called Kautilyā), outlined natural needs of the state to emphasize ends, not means. Max Weber likened Chānakya to Machiavelli; see Max Weber. 1991. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London: Routledge. Edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, pp. 123-24. For a more recent take, see Irfan Ahmad. 2012. 'How the War on Terror is a War of Terror'. *Al-Jazeera* (English). 11 September. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/>

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(⁶¹) Bipan Chandra, Amalek Tripathy, and Barun De. 1973. *Freedom Struggle*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.

(⁶²) Saileshwar Nath. 1980. *Terrorism in India*. New Delhi: National Publishing House, p. 1; see also Peter Heehs. 1993. 'Terrorism in India during the Freedom Struggle', *The Historian*, 55(3): 469–82.

(⁶³) The post-9/11 accounts of the history of terrorism in India by Indian 'security experts' like Chellaney simply erase the colonial era to focus on the present 'Islamic terrorism'. Brahma Chellaney. 2001–2. 'Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia: The Lessons of History', *International Security*, 26(3): 94–116.

(⁶⁴) Dipankar Gupta. 1985. 'The Communalising of Punjab, 1980–1985', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20(28): 1185–90; cf. Paul Wallace. 1995. 'Political Violence and Terrorism in India: The Crisis of Identity', in Martha Crenshaw (ed.), *Terrorism in Context*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University, pp. 352–409.

(⁶⁵) Chitrlekha. 2010. 'Committed, Opportunists and Drifters': Revisiting the Naxalite Narrative in Jharkhand and Bihar', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 44(3): 299–329.

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(⁶⁷) Tania Roy. 2009. 'India's 9/11: Accidents of a Moveable Metaphor', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(7–8): 314–28, see p. 315.

(⁶⁸) This phrase was readily embraced by the Indian media; see Bavadam's adoption of it. Lyla Bavadam. 2011. 'Sitting Duck', *Frontline*, 12 August, 28(16): 27–9.

(⁶⁹) Ramaswami Harindranath. 2009. 'Mediated Terrorism and Democracy in India', *South Asia*, 32(3): 518–32; R. Harindranath. 2011. 'Performing Terror, Anti-Terror, and Public Affect: Towards an Analytical Framework', *Continuum*, 25(2): 141–51.

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⁽⁷¹⁾ Robin Jeffrey. 2002. 'Grand Canyon, Shaky Bridge: Media Revolution and the Rise of 'Hindu' Politics', *South Asia*, 25(3): 281–300.

⁽⁷²⁾ Prasun Sonwalkar. 2006. 'Shooting the Messenger? Political Violence, Gujarat 2002 and the Indian News Media', in Benjamin Cole (ed.), *Conflict, Terrorism and the Media in Asia*, New York: Routledge, pp. 82–97, see p. 86.

⁽⁷³⁾ Nalin Mehta. 2006. 'Modi and the Camera: The Politics of Television in the 2002 Gujarat Riots', *South Asia*, 29(3): 395–414; cf. Shubh Mathur. 2008. *The Everyday Life of Hindu Nationalism: An Ethnographic Account*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ George Armstrong Kelly. 1980. 'Conceptual Sources of the Terror', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 14(1): 18–36. In contemporary studies of terrorism, there is almost a consensus that violence by the state is not terrorism. On the folly of such a conceptualization, see Ahmad, 'Is There an Ethics?'.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Lucinda Bell. 2004. 'The 1858 Trial of Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II for 'Crimes against the State''. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Melbourne University, p. 143.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ For a critique of this line of argumentation, see Irfan Ahmad 2012. 'Legitimizing the Killings in the Name of "Just War".' Al-Jazeera (English). 15 September.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Established in 1988, NDTV (New Delhi Television) was the first private provider of news content to Doordarshan (government television), BBC, and Murdoch's Star News with whom it broke its partnership in 2003. NDTV then launched its own channels—the English-language NDTV 24X7 and NDTV India in Hindi. Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, pp. 98–102.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ See 'The Indian Muslim Voice', available online at <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/new/wethepeople.aspx?id=196623#vidplay> (accessed on 10 February 2012).

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Kuldip Nayar. 2009. 'Muslims and the Indian Press', in Ather Farouqui (ed.), *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views*, pp. 40–5. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 40–45; Sonwalkar, 'Shooting the Messenger?'.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Cited in Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, p. 35.

⁽⁸¹⁾ See Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*. For a historical and ethnographic account of SIMI, see Irfan Ahmad. 2005. 'From Islamism to Post-Islamism: The Transformation of the Jamaat-e-Islami in North India'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Amsterdam, ch. 5; Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, ch. 6.

(⁸²) Irfan Ahmad. 2009. *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islam in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 35–6.

(⁸³) Irfan Ahmad. 2002. 'Timothy McVeighs of the Orient', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(15): 1399–1400.

(⁸⁴) Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, ch. 1.

(⁸⁵) Emphasis added; all italics in quotes from the talk show are mine, as are punctuation marks. The show was trilingual: English, Hindi, and Urdu. All translations into English are mine. Where necessary, in brackets I give non-English words transliterated according to the *Annual of Urdu Studies* guidelines (available at <http://www.urdustudies.com/>). I thank Z. Tazyeen for transcribing the NDTV talk show.

(⁸⁶) Paula Chakravartty. 2002. 'Translating Terror in India', *Television & New Media*, 3(2): 205–12.

(⁸⁷) Chakravartty, 'Translating Terror in India', p. 211, n. 4.

(⁸⁸) Also, consider this: in requesting George Bush to stem the post-9/11 retaliatory attacks, especially against Sikhs (whom Americans mistook as Muslims), the Indian prime minister showed that he did not care about Indian Muslims—a point made by Sikh Mediawatch and Taskforce. Chakravartty, 'Translating Terror in India', p. 211, n. 4.

(⁸⁹) Thomas Blom Hansen. 2004. 'Politics as Permanent Performance', in John Zavos, Andrew Wyatt, and Vernon Hewitt (eds), *The Politics of Cultural Mobilization in India*, pp. 19–36. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Harindranath, 'Performing Terror'.

(⁹⁰) Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood. 2002. 'Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75(2): 339–54.

(⁹¹) Chomsky Watch. 2010. 'Afghan War is Criminal: Noam Chomsky', *Chomsky Watch*, 7 November, available online at <http://chomskywatch.wordpress.com/2010/11/07/afghan-war-is-criminal-noam-chomsky/> (accessed on 12 February 2012). Also see Noam Chomsky. 2002. *September 11*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin; Noam Chomsky. 2003. *Power and Terror: Post-9/11 Talk and Interviews*. New York: Seven Stories.

(⁹²) Mahmood Mamdani. 2008. 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism', *American Anthropologist*, 104(3): 766–75; Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*.

(⁹³) K. Alan Kronstadt, Paul K. Kerr, Michael F. Martin, and Bruce Vaughn. 2011. *India: Domestic Issues, Strategic Dynamics, and U.S. Relations*. Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress, p. 71, n. 293.

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(⁹⁶) IANS. 2011. 'Blasts Suspect's Family Awaits Body for Funeral', *TwoCircles.Net*, 18 July, available online at http://twocircles.net/2011jul18/blasts_suspects_family_awaits_body_funeral.html (accessed on 22 July 2011).

(⁹⁷) *Mid-day.com*. 2011. 'Cops Conduct Nation-Wide Search for Indian Mujahideen Operatives'. *NDTV*, 18 July. Available online at <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/cops-conduct-nation-wide-search-for-indian-mujahideen-operatives-120125&cp> (accessed on 29 July 2011).

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(¹⁰³) Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy*, p. 243.

(¹⁰⁴) Hashmi, *What It Means*, p. 102.

(¹⁰⁵) Dighe, 'Disenfranchised and Disempowered', p. 523.

(¹⁰⁶) Somini Sengupta. 2006. 'Indian Opinion Splits on Call for Execution', *New York Times*, 9 October, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/09/world/asia/09iht-india.3088341.html> (accessed on 24 February 2012).

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(¹¹⁹) Swami, 'Terror Junction'. Emphasis added.

(¹²⁰) Swami, 'Riyaz Bhatkal', p. 5. Emphasis added.

(¹²¹) See 'Abdur Rahim, Falsely Accused of Mecca Masjid Blast', available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhoTwfKiKwY> (accessed on 18 September 2011).

(¹²²) See 'Rayeesuddin, Falsely Accused for Mecca Masjid Blast', available online at <http://www.youtube.com/user/twocirclesTV#p/search/1/ddmTETOUdDw> (accessed on 18 September 2011).

(¹²³) Hashmi, *What It Means*, p. 91.

(¹²⁴) Column Nine. 2008. *Media on Terror: A Column Nine Report on Terror Reporting in Karnataka*. Bangalore: Column Nine.

(¹²⁵) Column Nine, *Media on Terror*, pp. 12–16, 20.

(¹²⁶) Column Nine, *Media on Terror*, p. 14.

(¹²⁷) It is worth recalling that the Delhi police paraded three Muslim youths they had arrested after the Delhi blasts in 2008 in front of the media with their faces covered by Palestinian-style scarves in red-and-white checks. The police's choice of the Palestinian-style scarves was an act of rendering the symbol religious and foreign at once. Irfan Ahmad. 2009. 'The Secular State and the Geography of Radicalism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(23): 33–8.

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(¹²⁹) Shahid Azmi, Mumbai's 32-year-old defence lawyer fighting dozens of cases of terror suspects (Muslim youths) was shot dead in his office in February 2010. *TwoCircles.Net*, 2010. 'Adv Shahid Azmi Shot Dead in Mumbai', *TwoCircles.Net*,

11 February, available online at http://twocircles.net/2010feb11/adv_shahid_azmi_shot_dead_mumbai.html (accessed on 28 February 2012).

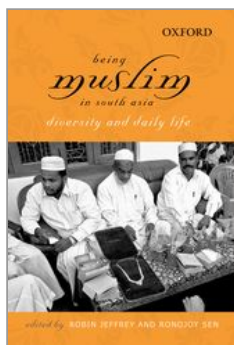
(¹³⁰) Hashmi, *What It Means*, pp. 86–8. Emphasis added.

(¹³¹) Hent de Vries. 2001. 'In Media Res: Global Religion, Public Spheres, and the Task of Contemporary Comparative Religious Studies', in Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (eds), *Religion and Media*, pp. 3–42. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

(¹³²) de Vries, 'In Media Res', p. 22.

(¹³³) Jacques Derrida. 2001. 'Above All, No Journalists!', in Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (eds), *Religion and Media*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 56–93. Emphasis in original.

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A Million Salutes

India's Mohammedan Sporting Club¹

Ronojoy Sen

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Abstract and Keywords

The victory of the Calcutta football club, Mohun Bagan, over an all-white British regimental team in the final of the 1911 IFA Shield, the premier football tournament in India at the time, is justly regarded as historic. However, yet another remarkable feat – the Mohammedan Sporting Club winning the Calcutta League five times on the trot between 1934 and 1938 besides other major tournaments – is mostly forgotten. This chapter explores the history of Mohammedan Sporting from the time it was formed in 1891. It examines the sporting exploits of the club against the backdrop of communal politics of India in the 1930s and 1940s. The main thrust of the chapter is on the history of the club till the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, after which the club never matched its earlier performances on the football field.

Keywords: sport, football, communalism, Muslim League, Calcutta, Mohun Bagan, Mohammedan Sporting Club, Bombay Pentangular

On 29 July 1911, the Mohun Bagan club, with 10 barefoot players, became the first Indian team to win the premier football tournament of the time, the Indian Football Association (IFA) Shield, in Calcutta. Mohun Bagan's win fired Bengali pride and was hailed as a significant nationalist moment. A Calcutta newspaper, the *Bengalee*, proclaimed that the Bengali was 'no longer the timid and weak-kneed representative of the race whom [Thomas] Macaulay so foully libelled'.² The **(p.331)** *Englishman* newspaper commented that Mohun Bagan had 'succeeded in what the Congress and the Swadeshiwallas have failed to do so far

to explode the myth that the Britishers are unbeatable in any sphere of life'.³ It further said that Mohun Bagan had been able to 'knit together' people in a way the political parties had not been able to.

There is some truth in this when we see the reactions by Calcutta Muslims to the 1911 victory. When the victory procession after the final was making its way to north Calcutta, several Muslims accompanied by a band joined the festivities. The *Mussalman*, a weekly, wrote that Mohun Bagan had 'demonstrated that Indians are second to none in all manly games'. But significantly it added that although the Mohun Bagan team was composed of Hindus, the jubilation over the Shield victory was not confined to any particular religion. As proof of this it pointed out: 'The members of the Muslim Sporting Club were almost mad and rolling on the ground with joyous excitement on the victory of their Hindu brethren.'⁴ If the 1911 Shield victory is still remembered and memorialized as a unifying event, another remarkable achievement—Mohammedan Sporting becoming the first Indian team to win the Calcutta First Division Football League in 1934 and subsequently winning it four more times on the trot between 1935 and 1938—is largely forgotten. The rise and success of Mohammedan Sporting was played out against the contentious communal politics of the time. This chapter looks at the story of Mohammedan Sporting both on the field and the passions it generated off the football pitch. It places Mohammedan Sporting in the context of Muslim identity and communal politics in Bengal of the 1930s and 1940s. A brief comparison is drawn with the Pentangular, a cricket tournament organized along communal lines in Bombay, to illustrate how sport, religion, and politics intersected outside Bengal. In conclusion, I raise a few questions about the place of Mohammedan Sporting in post-1947 India.

The Beginnings

Though Mohammedan Sporting came into existence in 1891, more than a decade before the political organization, Muslim League, was **(p.332)** founded, it had had three earlier reincarnations in Jubilee, Crescent, and Hamidia clubs. In 1891, Mohammedan Sporting had as its patrons many of the prominent Muslims of Bengal, including the former ruling family of Murshidabad and several civil servants. It was no accident that Bengal was the site for the club since by the turn of the century the province not only had the largest concentration of Muslims in India but one which was 'among the first to be organized politically to voice their rights as Muslims'.⁵ The first annual meeting of the club in 1894 was presided by Justice Syed Amir Ali (1849–1928). He was a member of the Muslim elite, also known as the *ashrafs*, from an illustrious lineage who had been trained in law in England and had an English wife. He was appointed a judge in 1890. Along with Nawab Abdul Latif in 1877, Amir Ali founded the Central National Muhammedan Association which was very much an organization restricted to the upper-class Muslim groups. In that sense his

association with football, which was much more a subaltern sport in India compared to cricket, was somewhat out of character.

The Glory Years

In its initial years, Mohammedan Sporting did not have its own ground and used the ground of the Calcutta Boys' School, a well-known private school, every alternate day for practice. Later, the club was allowed use of the ground full time while the school was provided with another playground. One of the early successes of the club was winning the Cooch Behar Trophy, founded by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar solely for Indian football teams, in 1909. In 1927, it created ripples by getting promoted into the second division of the Calcutta Football League. (The First Division Football League in Calcutta was born in 1894 and was out of bounds for Indian teams till 1914.) From the 1930s the Mohammedan Sporting team was one to reckon with. By 1933 the team was good enough to win promotion to the first division, notching eight consecutive wins in the final stretch. Amazingly, in its first appearance in the League in 1934, Mohammedan Sporting became the first Indian team to win the League. The pro-Muslim (p.333) League newspaper, *Star of India*, gushed that the 'Babes' of the first division achieved the impossible by winning the League in their very first year.⁶ The *Statesman*, a newspaper with a high British readership, reported that Mohammedan Sporting's victory in the last league match over unfancied Kalighat was greeted with 'unprecedented scenes of enthusiasm'.⁷ In 1936, the club achieved the rare double of winning both the League and the IFA Shield, becoming only the second Indian team after Mohun Bagan to win the Shield. Only three teams—Royal Irish Rifles, Gordon Highlanders, and Calcutta Football Club—had achieved this distinction. Twenty-five years after Mohun Bagan had lifted the Shield, Mohammedan Sporting repeated the feat by beating the Calcutta Football Club, but only after playing out draws in the first two encounters. (There were no tiebreakers in those days.) Mohammedan's achievement was reported as far away as Australia where the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried a news item headlined: 'Honour for Islam'.⁸

The euphoria over Mohammedan Sporting's victory spread like wildfire. Every match played by the club drew a huge crowd. The nationalist English daily, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, reported that the 'popularity of the team increased with every match' and the gates would have to be closed long before the match began.⁹ One stand in the ground was reserved for club members while two stands were open to the public who were charged eight annas for the enclosure with chairs and four annas in the wooden galleries. The crowds that thronged to see Mohammedan Sporting comprised of young men as well as older people including *maulvis* and *maulanas*. There was one Jan Muhammad who would occasionally cry out 'Allah-u-Akbar', galvanizing Mohammedan supporters.¹⁰ In 1935, for instance, some 60,000 people turned up to watch Mohammedan Sporting defeat Mohun Bagan at the Calcutta Football Club ground. After the victory 'fireworks were lit, balloons sent up, pigeons released and the

Mohammedans of (p.334) Calcutta made merry till late in the night'.¹¹ A souvenir published by the club in 1935 wrote of the thousands in the *mofussil* areas who 'followed each game with the greatest interest, so much so that many used to walk miles to the railway station to meet incoming trains with Calcutta newspapers in order to get the results as soon as possible'.¹² There were reports of crowds gathering in towns across Bengal around wireless loudspeakers that broadcast reports of the club matches. Several Muslim sporting clubs sprang up in the district and subdivisional headquarters in the wake of Mohammedan Sporting's success. Inspired by the success of Calcutta Mohammedan Sporting, Muslims in Dacca formed their own Dacca Mohammedan Sporting in 1936. Muslims took up sport, partly spurred by the proliferation of physical culture association among Hindus in both urban and rural Bengal. At the time the Muslims of Bengal were hardly a monolithic group, divided as they were by class and location. But the success of Mohammedan Sporting was part of the gradual process of bridging the 'factionalism, intrigue and conflicting interests of various Muslim groups'¹³ and contributing to Muslim communal unity.

The Reasons for Success

The astounding success of the club was built on several factors. First, by the 1930s the club had achieved some degree of financial solvency. In 1924, the club's balance sheet was still heavily in the red. While the club had merely Rs 9 in its kitty, its debts had reached Rs 3,600. Though the club had 208 members, very few actually paid membership fees, which amounted to Rs 25–30 per month.¹⁴ Things turned around when S.A. Rashid, along with I.G.H Arif, took charge of the club. They appealed to Muslims to donate generously to the club. The turnaround of the club also coincided with the formation in 1932 of a group called the New Muslim Majlis, which included members such (p.335) as Khwaja Nooruddin and M.A.H. Ispahani, and whose aim was to secure India's freedom as well as 'capture and re-organise the Muslim sporting club as the premier soccer team of India'.¹⁵ Nooruddin (1900–1968) was an alderman in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and later elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Besides, he was the secretary of Mohammedan Sporting during the crucial years between 1936 and 1945. The rise of Mohammedan Sporting Club also coincided with the ascendancy of the Muslim League in Bengal and political mobilization around Muslim identity. Several prominent Muslim League leaders such as Khwaja Nazimuddin, a cousin of Nooruddin, who later became the second governor general of Pakistan and subsequently prime minister, became life members. Nazimuddin was also elected as the president of the club. The governor of Bengal, John Anderson, became a patron of the club. Muslim merchants of the city, too, pitched in to build a fence around the club pavilion.

It was not just financial stability and a growing support base that fuelled the success of club. There were other footballing reasons. Mohammedan Sporting broke with the practice of its main Calcutta rivals, Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, by recruiting players from outside Bengal. In this it had a significant

advantage over its city rivals in that it could recruit Muslim players from all over the subcontinent. Indeed, the club recruited players from as far afield as Quetta and Peshawar in modern Pakistan. In 1936, for instance, the Mohammedan Sporting line-up that took on East Bengal for a charity game had as many as nine players from outside Bengal: Jumma Khan (Quetta), Rashid (Peshawar), Osman and Aquil (Delhi), Serajuddin, Saboo, Masoom, and Rahim (Bangalore), and Noor Mahommad (Fyzabad).¹⁶

In a significant breakthrough, the club decided to play football with boots on wet grounds. This was enormously important for Mohammedan Sporting's footballing success since it was the practice of the major Calcutta clubs to play barefoot. Indeed, the Indian football team played barefoot in international tournaments till as late as 1952. In 1933, for the first time, six Mohammedan Sporting players donned boots on a wet day and thrashed the Nebubagan side by an incredible 16-0 margin. The man in charge of the team, S.A. Aziz, even designed a light boot, created by local cobblers, suited for the **(p.336)** conditions in the Calcutta Maidan. However, the club did not let go the advantage of playing barefoot on dry grounds. Even veterans like Samad, who had been playing in the Calcutta Maidan for nearly two decades, adjusted remarkably well to boots, running with the 'easy grace of a stag', showing 'admirable precision in his shots', and proving to be 'quite a wonder-man in his new equipage'.¹⁷

To Mohammedan Sporting must also go the credit for throwing up the first international football player from India—the club's star forward, Salim. His remarkable story reads like a fantasy. Born in the predominantly Muslim locality of Metiabruz in Calcutta, Salim began his playing career with small club called Chittaranjan before moving to the bigger Bowbazar Club. He had a brief stint with Mohammedan Sporting before being recruited by the Sporting Union Club. Within a couple of years he moved yet again to Aryan Club, which was being coached by the legendary footballer Choney Majumdar. He returned to Mohammedan Sporting in 1934 to help them to win their first League title. Salim was the spearhead of the Mohammedan attack, with immaculate ball control and passing skills.

After Mohammedan Sporting won the 1936 League title, Salim was picked for the All India Eleven to play the Chinese Olympic team in Calcutta, which was playing exhibition matches in India. The official in charge of the Chinese team, Chi Chao Yung, was very impressed by the forward line of the Indian team that, besides Salim, could boast of players like Rahim, Bhattacharjee, and Abbas. But when it was time for the second match against the Chinese team Salim had gone missing. The story goes that Salim, along with a friend, had embarked on a trip to Europe. He eventually surfaced in Glasgow, though why he chose Scotland as his eventual destination is a mystery. Salim's companion, Hasheem, convinced the manager of the famous Celtic Football Club to try out Salim. The trial took

some time to organize since the local football federation was nonplussed by a barefoot footballer. Eventually when the trial took place, Salim so dazzled the club officials that he was picked to play in Celtic's next match. He played two games in which Celtic beat Hamilton and Galston 5-1 and 7-1 respectively. After the second game the *Scottish Daily Express* on 29 August 1936 ran a story headlined: 'Indian Juggler - New Style'. The reporter was mesmerized by Salim's skills:

(p.337) Ten twinkling toes of Salim, Celtic FC's player from India hypnotised the crowd at Parkhead last night in an alliance game with Galston. He balances the ball on his big toe, lets it run down the scale to his little toe, twirls it, hops on one foot around the defender, then flicks the ball to the center who has only to send it into the goal. Three of Celtic's seven goals last night came from his moves. Was asked to take a penalty, he refused. Said he was shy. Salim does not speak English, his brother translates for him. Brother Hashim thinks Salim is wonderful—so did the crowd last night.¹⁸

Though Salim had offers to stay on in Europe he chose to return to Calcutta to help Mohammedan Sporting Club lift the Calcutta League title for the fourth time in 1937. Salim's story could easily be dismissed as a fairy tale if it were not for the faded *Scottish Daily Express* news report carefully preserved by his son.¹⁹ The story was picked up much later by *Junior Statesman*, a Calcutta newspaper, and *Khelar Ashar*, a Bengali sports magazine. But the remarkable, almost unreal, story of Salim is little known today.

It was not just Salim who was winning recognition. In a first for Indian footballers, two Mohammedan Sporting players featured in advertisements for the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board. One was Noor Mohamed, the 'sturdy centre half back' of the club, and the other, Jumma Khan, described as 'one of India's best full backs'. The ads were quite remarkable considering that no Indian sportsperson, not even cricketers, had until then featured in advertisements. C.K. Nayudu, one of the superstars of Indian cricket and captain of the first official Indian team that toured England in 1932, featured in an advertisement for the first time for Bathgate's Liver Tonic only in 1941.

The impact of Mohammedan Sporting's astounding success, like Mohun Bagan's 1911 victory, was hardly limited to the football pitch. At one level the 1934 League victory was greeted as a landmark event. The popular song —'Mohammedan Sporting tumko lakhon lakhon salam/ ham ab deshka badshah bane, aur sab hai **(p.338)** ghulam (Mohammedan Sporting, a million salutes to you/ We have now become kings of the country, all the rest are slaves)'— captured perfectly what the victory meant to Muslims. The successful run by Mohammedan Sporting inspired Muslim poets like the great Kazi Nazrul Islam to compose poetry in honour of the team: 'These feet that have so incredibly

woven wonders with the football—/ May the power of all of India rise from those very feet,/ May those feet break our chains. And our fear, and our dread—/ May those feet kick them away! Allah-u-Akbar!’²⁰

The popular singer Abbasuddin recorded the compositions of poet Golam Mostafa, composed on the occasion of Mohammedan Sporting winning the Calcutta League five times, which were released by the Gramophone Record Company.²¹ The mayor of Calcutta, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, hailed the win as a ‘great unifier’ and a matter of ‘pleasure and gratification of all citizens’.²² The president of the IFA, the Maharaja of Santosh, said the win had ‘enhanced the reputation of Indian footballers’.²³ Similarly a message from the Aligarh University said Mohammedan Sporting’s success was a ‘glory to Indian football’.²⁴ There is little doubt that the radio, print, and gramophone contributed to the expanding footprint of Mohammedan Sporting.

At the same time, there were definite intimations of Muslim leaders claiming the victory as a signal event for the community. The Krishak Praja Party leader and future premier of Bengal, Fazlul Huq, noted that Mohammedan Sporting had ‘earned a name for Muslims in the sporting world, of which the community may justly be proud’.²⁵ Syed Abdul Hafiz, another prominent politician, wrote in a congratulatory message that the ‘club came into existence to fulfil a long felt want of the sporting spirit of the community’.²⁶ There was also some reason to believe that the Krishak Praja Party-Muslim League coalition **(p.339)** government bent the rules in allotting a plot in the Maidan solely to Mohammedan Sporting, when all major Indian clubs shared their ground with another club. Huq, who had played for Mohammedan Sporting in its early days, and Khwaja Nazimuddin, were present at the opening of the ground. The allotment of the new ground, however, created such bad blood that a match between the club and a team from the rest of the Calcutta sides, staged to celebrate the occasion, was boycotted by members of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal and the Hindu public in general.²⁷

The Communal Rift

Mohammedan Sporting’s remarkable run happened at a time when Indian politics was polarized between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, and communal tensions were rife in Bengal. The Muslim League had been a marginal presence in Bengal until 1933 when it was revived in the wake of Hindu opposition to the Communal Award. Bengal also had one of the worst records of Hindu-Muslim conflict. Between 1905 and 1947, Bengal saw several riots with Calcutta being one of the most violence-prone areas in the province. The situation was such that events like playing music before mosques or a vehicle running over a child or certain kinds of plays could trigger sudden violence. And often, a Mohammedan Sporting defeat on the football pitch ended in violence.²⁸ The growing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, especially in

urban centres like Calcutta, possibly influenced the chain of events that would split the football world in Calcutta.

Trouble began on 11 June 1937. During a Mohammedan Sporting-East Bengal League match an East Bengal official was hit by a Mohammedan Sporting player. The incident was followed by violence outside the ground including the stabbing of a 13-year-old boy. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote a day later that communalism had invaded the Calcutta Maidan. The situation worsened when the IFA suspended Habib, one of the best players of Mohammedan Sporting, instead of Sattar, who had supposedly hit the East Bengal official. The IFA (p. 340) president, the Maharaja of Santosh, suggested that the club take steps to rein in its supporters. On its part Mohammedan Sporting found the IFA's suggestions unacceptable and said it would not play any more League matches until the resolution was taken back. The club conducted its own inquiry, which found Sattar, and not Habib, guilty and immediately suspended him. When the club secretary K. Nooruddin protested against the IFA decisions, he was banned from attending the governing body meetings for the next three years. This prompted Mohammedan Sporting to withdraw from the Calcutta League.

A temporary truce was, however, reached after a meeting between Santosh and Nooruddin, and Mohammedan Sporting was given some more time to lodge an appeal. While the hectic parleys were on, Mohammedan Sporting won the League for the fourth time on 2 July 1937. Four days later, the IFA decided that Mohammedan Sporting would not be given any more time and rejected the appeal of the club. The controversy dragged for another year with Mohammedan Sporting meanwhile winning its fifth League title in 1938. Though, Mohammedan Sporting played that year's IFA Shield under protest, as it was fed up with what it felt was 'repeated bad refereeing, arbitrary decisions with regard to venue of matches and generally the tyranny of the majority of the council of the IFA'.²⁹

The next year, before a second-leg match against Mohun Bagan in the Calcutta League, Mohammedan Sporting pulled out of the tournament. A few days later three other teams—East Bengal, Kalighat, and Aryan—also pulled out. (Aryan made an about-turn soon after though and rejoined the League.) The bridging of the communal divide on this occasion was interesting though the reason for the other Calcutta clubs pulling out seems to have been a result of antipathy towards Mohun Bagan's dominance and its policy of opposition to importing players from outside Bengal.³⁰ The 'rebel' clubs, which played exhibition matches against each other for the rest of the season in front of large crowds, even formed a rival Bengal Football Association and organized a Brabourne Cup that year. In 1940, however, the three clubs returned to the IFA's fold. The off-field controversies did not (p.341) seem to have affected Mohammedan Sporting's form since it became the first Indian team to win the prestigious Durand Trophy, held in Delhi, beating the Royal Warwickshire Regiment 2-1 as well as lifting the Rovers Cup, western India's premier tournament, in 1940 by

defeating another Indian team, the Bangalore Muslims. Interestingly, the only Indian team to have won the Rovers Cup was the Bangalore Muslims—despite its name the club had footballers from other communities—which defeated Mohammedan Sporting 1-0 in the 1937 final. It followed this up by winning the trophy the next year by beating the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Contemporary accounts of the events of 1937-9, however, showed the deep divisions on the Maidan that mirrored the bitter communal politics of the time. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* laid the blame on the original incident of 1937 on the Mohammedan Sporting supporters:

We have not the least doubt that none regrets more the disgraceful conduct of some of the Muslims among the spectators than the Mohammedan team ... it is common knowledge that communal partisanship often finds very disgraceful expression in language whenever a Muslim player comes to grief at the hands of his Hindu opponents.... Calcutta football maidan is no longer the respectable place that it once was. The invasion of communalism of sports has invested it with bad odour to decent people.³¹

The same day the *Statesman* wrote in an editorial:

In India one community hates another virulently for the love of the game. If a side and its supporters cannot take a beating without showing the savagery seen on Friday it were better that inter community games be forbidden by some Criminal Law Amendment Act: A Communal Award could hardly rouse worse passions.... Calcutta football seems to be not a pale, but a highly coloured reflection of Bengal politics.³²

J.C. Maitra, the Bengali sports editor of the *Bombay Chronicle* and an opponent of any form of communalism on the sporting field, blamed the situation mostly on Mohammedan Sporting supporters, who celebrated 'their successes with fury' and in defeat did not spare players (**p.342**) or referees.³³ He added, 'The plain fact remains that the sporting life of Bengal, particularly in the domain of football, became so vitiated that any contest was impossible under normal conditions.'³⁴

However, the pro-Muslim *Star of India*, which was the mouthpiece of the New Muslim Majlis, had a completely different take on events. Its editorial on 20 June 1937 indicated how communal thinking had infiltrated the playing field:

The Mohammedans merited the severest punishment in their [the IFA's] eyes for other reasons. They had driven out of the picture the 'Premier' Indian team and all teams, in fact, which had held supremacy before the advent of the all-conquering Mohammedans. They had taken the glory out of Hindu football, and had fought their way to a glory never before

achieved by Indians.... The very idea of so much glory to the Mohammedans seemed to have destroyed appetites and stolen sleep of the thousands of the only loving children of Mother India.³⁵

Events outside the playing field would continue to cast their shadow on Calcutta football. Because of the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946, the IFA Shield was not held that year and the League was cancelled the next year.

Comparison with the Bombay Pentangular

The entry of politics into the playing field was not unusual in other parts of India. Perhaps the more famous instance was the controversy over the pentangular cricket tournament in Bombay. The Bombay Pentangular originated with matches between the Europeans and Parsis beginning in the 1890s. Later, Hindus from 1907 and Muslims from 1912 joined to make it a four-cornered contest. Much later, in 1937, yet another team, the 'Others', comprising Christians and Anglo-Indians, was included, making the tournament a pentangular. What is less known is that similar tournaments based on religion and race were also held in Karachi, Lahore, and Delhi. But the Bombay Quadrangular was by far the most popular cricket tournament in **(p.343)** pre-independent India, where the best cricketers in India displayed their skills.

It was from the 1930s that the communal organization of the Quadrangular began to stir controversy. In 1930-3, which coincided with momentous events in India's freedom struggle, including the Congress-led civil disobedience movement, the tournament was not held. In 1934, its resumption coincided with the inauguration of the national cricket tournament, the Ranji Trophy. Though enthusiasm was sky-high for the Quadrangular, which had been sorely missed by cricket fans, there was some opposition too. One of the principal critics was Maitra, whose avowed goal was the eradication of 'distinctions between caste, creed and colour from the field of sport'. But he admitted in 1934 that 'if the sale of tickets at the various Gymkhanas is any indication of its popularity among the votaries of the game, communalism has won with all ten wickets in hand'.³⁶

With the beginning of World War II in 1939, the Pentangular faced its biggest threat. When Britain declared war on Germany it also included India in the war effort without consulting any Indian leaders. The Congress responded by resigning en masse from the provincial governments. The next year, the Muslim League announced its support for a separate homeland for Muslims while Congress leaders began courting arrest to oppose the war and call for India's independence. In the highly charged situation, unsurprisingly, the staging of the Pentangular was thrown into doubt. Those opposed to the tournament were usually from the Congress, and as Ramachandra Guha points out, it was the Hindu Gymkhana that felt the real pressure to withdraw. In these difficult circumstances, the Hindu Gymkhana sought the opinion of the one man whose opinion carried the most weight—Mahatma Gandhi. His answer to the three

representatives of the Hindu Gymkhana who met him at his ashram in Wardha in early December was unambiguous. Having professed his ignorance of cricket, Gandhi said his 'sympathies are wholly with those who would like to see these matches stopped'. He gave as his first reason the incongruity of such 'amusements' as cricket matches when there was war in Europe and Asia. But what strengthened the hands of the **(p.344)** anti-Pentangular lobby was Gandhi's ruling against communal organization of the tournament:

Incidentally, I would like their sporting code to erase from it communal matches. I can understand matches between Colleges and Institutions, but I have never understood the reason for having Hindu, Parsi, Muslim and other Communal Elevens. I should have thought that such unsportsmanlike divisions would be considered taboos in sporting language and sporting manners. Can we not have some field of life which would be untouched by communal spirit?³⁷

This resulted in the Hindus pulling out of that year's tournament and eventually set in motion a chain of events that led to the scrapping of the tournament in 1946.

The incredible popularity of the Pentangular raises the question as to whether the love of cricket or communal one-upmanship was at the heart of the tournament. It was probably a bit of both. The players who took part in the tournament, be it Hindu, Muslim, or Parsi, thought highly of the tournament not only for the quality of cricket but also for the camaraderie it encouraged. But there are also accounts of people recounting that shouts of 'Down with the Mussalmans' or 'Down with the Hindus' were common in the stands. However, despite the vitiated atmosphere in which these games were played in the 1930s and 1940s it seems such incidents rarely went out of hand or affected the on-field cricket. In fact, the criticism of the tournament by Congress-minded people like Maitra was primarily on the grounds that it militated against inclusive Indian nationalism. Thus, at a meeting organized by the Citizens' Anti-Pentangular Committee in 1941, Syed Abdullah Brelvi, editor of *Bombay Chronicle*, asked how supporters of the Pentangular could justify opposing 'separate electorates, or even Pakistan'.³⁸ Similarly, the jurist Sir Chimanlal Setalvad strongly condemned the Pentangular, writing in 1941 that the Pentangular encouraged the young to think of themselves in terms of their religion when they should be 'led to think and act always as **(p.345)** Indians first and everything afterwards'.³⁹ This provoked a letter to the editor in the *Times of India* by a writer named 'Curious' who asked, 'Would he [Setalvad] let us know whether the famous Mohammedan Sporting football team should be abandoned because by its practically unbeaten record it has spread the gospel of communal hatred as no leader could have?'⁴⁰

Mohammedan Sporting vs Bangalore Muslims

Though there are parallels between the different religious communities fielding teams in the Pentangular and the story of Mohammedan Sporting in Calcutta, the real difference is that Mohammedan Sporting was playing in tournaments that were not organized on communal lines. But like in the Pentangular, the club was playing and winning tournaments at a time when politics was deeply fractured along religious lines. This often influenced spectators, much more so in the Calcutta Maidan than in Bombay, and at the same time figured in the political debates of the times. Mohammedan Sporting had an all-India following as was evident from a record attendance—described as the ‘biggest crowd which has ever paid for admission to the Cooperage’⁴¹—showing up to watch the Calcutta club take on the All Blues Club in the 1936 Rovers Cup quarter-final. The same year when Mohammedan Sporting played an exhibition match at Patna against the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry team, ‘several thousand witnessed the match’ and the East Indian Railway ran local specials to transport the spectators.⁴²

The next year, Mohammedan Sporting reached the final of the Rovers Cup where it played the Bangalore Muslims before a ‘crowd bordering on the 10000 mark’ at the Cooperage, the venue for the tournament.⁴³ The *Bombay Chronicle*’s correspondent estimated an even bigger crowd and reported that the Bangalore Muslims ‘treated 20,000 spectators with their brilliant display of first class football and many a time held their audience spellbound’.⁴⁴ Despite its name, the Bangalore Muslims, unlike Mohammedan Sporting, was a mixed team with at **(p.346)** least four non-Muslims—Kadavelu, Linganna, Laxmi Narayan, and Murgesh—in the team. And ironically it was a Hindu player, Laxmi Narayan, who scored the winning goal for Bangalore Muslims.

The mixed composition of the Bangalore Muslims team made them poster boys for secular and nationalist organizations. Before the finals the team was entertained by the King’s Circle Sports Club at a dinner party presided over by its president S. Narayana Iyer. After its victory the Bangalore Muslims team was feted by local Congress party members who threw a reception. The *Bombay Chronicle* reported that Brelvi told the meeting: ‘The most pleasing feature of their victory was that it was achieved by a team which consisted of Hindus and Muslims.’⁴⁵ When his turn came to speak, the Bangalore Muslim’s secretary Esmail said that there was ‘no distinction between Hindu and Muslims in Bangalore’ and that the Bangalore Muslims ‘had proved that just as through Hindu-Muslim cooperation they wanted to secure their country’s freedom, so, through similar cooperation, they could vindicate their country’s name in sports’. The Bangalore Muslims proved that their victory was no fluke by lifting the Rovers Cup again in 1938 by defeating the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Three years later, however, Mohammedan Sporting took revenge by defeating Bangalore Muslims to lift the Rovers Cup in 1940, which was also the 50th anniversary of the tournament. In contrast to the 1937 victory of the Bangalore Muslims, soon after Mohammedan Sporting's triumph, Muhammad Jinnah in 1941 told Muslim students at the Cooperage that the 'discipline which sports teach must be harnessed for the benefit of the Muslim community as a whole'.⁴⁶ For Jinnah and other Muslim League leaders, Mohammedan Sporting's prowess was an important unifying force and a source of pride for the Muslim community at a time when the demand for Pakistan was being forcefully articulated.

Despite the nationalist opposition to the cricket pentangular in 1940, the Western Indian Football Association announced a similar tournament in football. The tournament, which was played at the Cooperage, consisted of five teams: the Hindus, Muslims, Europeans, Goans, and the Rest. Naturally the *Bombay Chronicle* was strongly critical of the idea: 'It is most unfortunate that while serious efforts (p.347) are being made everywhere to abolish sporting competitions on communal basis, a new one should have been added to the list. It is common knowledge that this form of sport instead of fostering friendly relations between the communities concerned accentuates their differences.'⁴⁷ The football pentangular did not last more than a year but the Mohammedan Sporting Club outlasted Indian independence.

The Club's Fortune in Independent India

With Indian independence and the partition of the subcontinent, the migration of many patrons of Mohammedan Sporting to East and West Pakistan dealt a blow to the club. The club, however, continues to exist to this day, having been transformed in many ways in the 60-plus years since Indian independence. It has found it difficult to replicate its success in the post-1947 period, though sporadically it has done well. In fact, in the initial years of independent India, Hyderabad Police, comprising mostly Muslim players, was a more dominant team than Mohammedan Sporting. In 1950, Hyderabad Police won 13 of the 15 tournaments it participated in, including the Durand and Rovers Cups.⁴⁸ Over the next four years, Hyderabad Police won the Rovers Cup each and every time. The team was predominantly composed of Muslims, though there was the odd Hindu or Christian player turning out for the club.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the name Mohammedan Sporting was a popular one across South Asia. There was a Karachi Mohammedan Sporting, which took part in the 1955 IFA Shield, losing in the quarter-final.⁵⁰ Three years later in the 1958 IFA Shield Calcutta's Mohammedan Sporting met and defeated its Dacca counterpart in the quarter-final.⁵¹ The Dacca Mohammedan Sporting occasionally took part in Indian tournaments reaching the final of the 1996 IFA Shield only to lose to East Bengal via a tiebreaker.⁵²

(p.348) Along with Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, Mohammedan Sporting was part of the trio of the clubs that dominated Calcutta football. In 1956, Mohammedan Sporting won the Rovers Cup for the second time, following it up by winning both the Calcutta League and the IFA Shield in 1957 and the DCM Trophy in 1958. A decade later in 1967, the club won the Calcutta League and in 1971 the IFA Shield. The early 1980s was a golden period with Mohammedan Sporting winning the Rovers Cup and the DCM Trophy in 1980, the Calcutta League in 1981, the Federation Cup and the Rovers Cup in 1984, and the double of Rovers Cup and the Calcutta League in 1987. By the 1990s though Mohammedan Sporting was no longer the force it was, relegated to the second tier of Indian football and suffering from a severe cash crunch. While its rivals, East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, not only found corporate sponsors but also had around 8,000 annual paying members, Mohammedan Sporting was down to a few hundred members who were willing pay annual dues.⁵³

While this chapter has focussed on Mohammedan Sporting's football exploits, it must be noted that the club also fielded hockey and cricket teams. Indeed, in 1945, Mohammedan Sporting reached the Beighton Cup (the oldest and at the time the most prestigious hockey tournament in India) final where it lost to the Bengal Nagpur Railway team.⁵⁴ Again in 1957 Mohammedan Sporting reached the finals of the Beighton, this time being beaten narrowly by East Bengal in front of a 'huge crowd'.⁵⁵ It had to wait till 1981 to play another Beighton Cup final but once again it lost to an Indian Hockey Federation Eleven.⁵⁶

The most notable aspect of Mohammedan Sporting's evolution in independent India was the composition of the club's team in the post-1947 period. In the 1950s, the Mohammedan Sporting team was still composed primarily of Muslims. For instance, in the 1958 DCM Trophy final against East Bengal the Mohammedan Sporting line-up was all-Muslim,⁵⁷ including the Pakistani player Omar who was the subject of controversy a few years later being disallowed to play for his **(p.349)** country due to his club affiliation in India.⁵⁸ Interestingly, the hockey side fielded by Mohammedan Sporting in the 1957 Beighton Cup final had three non-Muslims: Arthur, Pritam Singh, and K. Pal.⁵⁹

From the 1960s, however, non-Muslim players began playing for the club in greater numbers. One of the star players of that era was N. Papanna, a footballer from Mysore, who played for the club for eight years from 1966 and also represented India. From the 1970s, more non-Muslim players, such as Peter Thangaraj, Sukumar Sen, and Victor Amalraj to name just a few, began to turn out for Mohammedan Sporting. This trend would continue with Muslims players gradually becoming a minority from the 1980s till the present day. In the early 1980s, bankrolled by a Calcutta Muslim businessman, the club managed to attract several players from the rival Mohun Bagan and East Bengal teams. The line-up of Mohammedan Sporting that won the 1980 DCM trophy had six Hindus and two Christians.⁶⁰ Similarly, the team that won the Calcutta League in 1981,

after a gap of nearly 15 years, had as many as eight Hindus, and that too upper-caste Brahmins, turning out for Mohammedan Sporting. One of the stars of the team, Prasun Banerjee, who transferred to Mohammedan Sporting from Mohun Bagan, recalled that the supporters of Mohammedan Sporting, many of whom were poor Muslims, showered their affection on the non-Muslim players.⁶¹ In the line-up that won the Rovers Cup in 1987 there were only four Muslims, including Jamshed Nassiri from Iran.

Conversely, Mohammedan Sporting was not always the first choice of talented Muslim players in independent India who played wherever the money and opportunity were better. For instance, the legendary Ahmed Khan (who represented India in the 1948 and 1952 Olympics) played for East Bengal for a decade in 1949–59 before joining Mohammedan Sporting at the fag end of his career. The mobility of Muslim footballers whose loyalty was not tied to Mohammedan Sporting was very much evident when another great player, Musa, who had played for Mohammedan in the 1950s, joined East Bengal **(p. 350)** for a few years. Again, Mohammed Habib, a star from a later era, first joined East Bengal in the 1960s when he came to Calcutta from Hyderabad, later played for Mohammedan Sporting and Mohun Bagan before switching back to East Bengal.

The violence that sometimes accompanied matches played by Mohammedan Sporting in the communally charged atmosphere of the 1930s and 1940s did not completely die out in independent India. From the 1950s to the 1990s there were several incidents of violence during Mohammedan Sporting matches. In 1959, police had to lathi charge 5,000 angry fans who surrounded and threw stones at the Mohammedan Sporting tent after their team had lost to Mohun Bagan.⁶² A decade later, a game between Mohammedan Sporting and a smaller club, Wari Athletic, had to be abandoned because of crowd violence after a disputed goal.⁶³ It must be noted, however, that matches between other clubs too—especially the ones between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal—were prone to as much or even greater violence both on and off the field.

This raises important questions about the relationship of the identity of Indian Muslims, both players and fans, to Mohammedan Sporting. Whereas in pre-partition Bengal, Mohammedan Sporting was a source of Muslim identity and pride besides being the natural choice for Muslim footballers, these ties have weakened considerably in post-1947 India. While Mohammedan Sporting still has its committed Muslim supporters, what the club signifies for Muslims in contemporary India requires further research. Mohammedan Sporting Club officials are at pains to stress their club is no different from the other two big Calcutta clubs. The club president Sultan Ahmed, a member of the Lower House of Parliament representing the Trinamool Congress and then Union minister,

told me, 'We are just like the other ethnic clubs such as East Bengal and Mohun Bagan.'⁶⁴ What Ahmed was referring to was the support base of East Bengal (p. 351) and Mohun Bagan, which for the former traditionally came from eastern Bengal and later from refugees from what is now Bangladesh and for the latter from the original inhabitants of West Bengal. But these divisions have rarely been cast in stone as Mohun Bagan, right from the beginning, had several players from eastern Bengal playing for it. Ahmed, however, said that unlike Mohun Bagan or East Bengal, Mohammedan Sporting always drew a big crowd wherever it played in India because of its Muslim support base. This is of course only partially true as there is evidence to suggest that the poor performance of the club in recent times has led to a decline in interest even among its die-hard fans. Shabbir Ali, who played for Mohammedan Sporting for seven years in the 1980s and was later appointed the club's coach, said that in his playing days fans would flock to the stadium even if the team lost. Ali, who represented India and is now an officer with the state-owned Allahabad Bank, told me that supporters were no longer coming in.⁶⁵

Another senior club official, Iqbal Ahmed, who is a member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly (as well being the brother of Sultan Ahmed), claimed that Mohammedan Sporting is Muslim only in name and is purely a 'secular club'.⁶⁶ He pointed to the fact that over 90 per cent of the players today are non-Muslims. While this is obviously true, the relationship of Mohammedan Sporting fans, an overwhelming majority of whom are Muslim and not just restricted to Bengal, with the club still remains special. Despite its declining fortunes, it is also apparent that the club is important enough for Kolkata's Muslim politicians, such as Sultan and Iqbal Ahmed, to maintain a hold on Mohammedan Sporting. The transformation of Mohammedan Sporting and its place in contemporary India is a story that remains to be told.

Notes:

(¹) The title is taken from the popular song from the 1930s: '*Mohammedan Sporting tumko lakhon lakhon salam/ham ab deshka badshah bane, aur sab hai ghulam* (Mohammedan Sporting, a million salutes to you/We have now become kings of the country, all the rest are slaves).'

(²) Kausik Bandyopadhyay. 2008. *Playing for Freedom: A Historic Sports Victory*. New Delhi: Standard Publishers, p. 70.

(³) *Englishman*, 31 July 1911.

(⁴) Bandyopadhyay, *Playing for Freedom*, pp. 75–6.

(⁵) Suranjan Das. 1991. *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 1.

(⁶) *Star of India*, 6 July 1934.

- (⁷) *Statesman*, 6 July 1934.
- (⁸) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September, 1936.
- (⁹) *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 July 1934.
- (¹⁰) Partha Chatterjee. 2012. *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 320.
- (¹¹) *Times of India*, 1 June 1935.
- (¹²) Kausik Bandyopadhyay. 2011. *Scoring off the Field: Football Culture in Bengal, 1911-80*. New Delhi: Routledge, p. 114.
- (¹³) Kenneth McPherson. 1974. *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, p. iv.
- (¹⁴) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring off the Field*, p. 110.
- (¹⁵) Mcpherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*, p. 121.
- (¹⁶) *Times of India*, 5 June 1936.
- (¹⁷) *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 6 July 1934.
- (¹⁸) *Scottish Daily Express*, 29 August, 1936. See also Boria Majumdar and Kausik Bandyopadhyay. 2006. *Goalless: The Story of a Unique Footballing Nation*. New Delhi: Viking, p. 87.
- (¹⁹) *Scottish Daily Express*, 29 August, 1936. See also Majumdar and Bandyopadhyay. *Goalless*, p. 87.
- (²⁰) Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, p. 321.
- (²¹) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring off the Field*, p. 122.
- (²²) *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1 August 1934.
- (²³) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring off the Field*, p. 119.
- (²⁴) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring Off the Field*, p. 118.
- (²⁵) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring Off the Field*, p. 119.
- (²⁶) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring Off the Field*, p. 120.
- (²⁷) *Times of India*, 9 May 1938.
- (²⁸) Das, *Communal Riots*, p. 170.

(²⁹) Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring off the Field*, p. 135.

(³⁰) Jagadish Chandra Maitra. 1965. *Indian Sports Flashback*. Bombay: Commercial Printing Press, p. 148.

(³¹) *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 June 1937.

(³²) *Statesman*, 13 June 1937.

(³³) Maitra, *Indian Sports Flashback*, p. 146.

(³⁴) Maitra, *Indian Sports Flashback*, p. 147.

(³⁵) *Star of India*, 20 June 1937.

(³⁶) Ramachandra Guha. 2003. *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport*. London: Macmillan, p. 228.

(³⁷) *Times of India*, 7 December 1940.

(³⁸) Guha, *Corner of a Foreign Field*, pp. 283–4.

(³⁹) Chimanlal Setalvad, 'Communalism in Sport: Cricket and the larger issues', *The Times of India*, 20 November 1941.

(⁴⁰) *Times of India*, 21 November 1941.

(⁴¹) *Times of India*, 1 September 1936.

(⁴²) *Times of India*, 13 August 1936.

(⁴³) *Times of India*, 2 September 1937.

(⁴⁴) *Bombay Chronicle*, 1 September 1937.

(⁴⁵) *Bombay Chronicle*, 3 September 1937.

(⁴⁶) Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, p. 279.

(⁴⁷) *Bombay Chronicle*, 20 July 1940.

(⁴⁸) Kumar Mukherjee. 2002. *The Story of Football*. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, p. 105.

(⁴⁹) *Times of India*, 23 October 1953.

(⁵⁰) *Times of India*, 1 October 1955.

(⁵¹) *Times of India*, 19 September 1958.

(⁵²) *Times of India*, 9 February 1996.

(⁵³) Gautam Bhattacharyya, 'Mohd. Sporting in financial mess,' *The Times of India*, 20 February 1998

(⁵⁴) *Times of India*, 30 April 1945.

(⁵⁵) *Times of India*, 10 May 1957.

(⁵⁶) *Times of India*, 3 May 1981.

(⁵⁷) *Times of India*, 22 October 1958.

(⁵⁸) *Times of India*, 23 June 1961.

(⁵⁹) *Times of India*, 10 May 1957.

(⁶⁰) *Times of India*, 10 November 1980.

(⁶¹) Interview with Prasun Banerjee, 22 September 2011. See also *Times of India*, 21 August 1981.

(⁶²) *Times of India*, 7 June 1959.

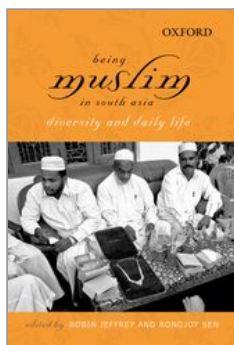
(⁶³) *Times of India*, 17 June 1970.

(⁶⁴) Interview with Sultan Ahmed, 21 September 2011.

(⁶⁵) Interview with Shabbir Ali, 27 December 2011.

(⁶⁶) Interview with Iqbal Ahmed, 22 September 2011.

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(p.352) Glossary

adab

refinement, good manners, decorum, etiquette

Ahl-e-Hadith

people who interpret Islam according to its fundamental texts, the Koran and the *hadith*, and do not identify as followers of the historic law schools, e.g. Hanafi, a distinctive Sunni denominational orientation in South Asia from the nineteenth century

ajlaf

South Asian Muslims deemed to be of lower status than those claiming to be *ashraf*, *q.v.* below

aqida

belief

arzal

people in South Asia deemed to be of lowest status, below *ashraf* and *ajlaf*

ashraf

high-status people; the well-born; South Asian Muslims describing themselves as *sayyid*, *shaikh*, Mughal, or Pathan

baraka

a blessing; spiritual power

Barelwi

a Sunni denominational group in South Asia that emerged during the late-nineteenth century; often associated with religious practices tied to Sufi shrines

bid'at

invention or innovation within Islam; commonly used by the reformist Deobandis, **(p.353)** Wahhabis, Salafis, and Ahle Hadith to condemn practices they regard as contrary to the Sunna of the Prophet.

biradari

caste or clan; people who regard themselves as related

dar ul-harb

literally, a land of war; a country not ruled by Muslims

dars-i nizami

a curriculum for the study of Islam developed in the eighteenth century

dar ul-aman

a place of peace where Muslims are not constrained in religious practice

Darul Uloom at Deoband

a reformist institution of learning established in 1867 in Deoband in north India

dar ul-fasad

land of conflict

dar ul-islam

land under Muslim rule

Deobandi

a Hanafi Sunni sectarian orientation in South Asia that emerged during the late-nineteenth century in conjunction with the Darul Uloom madrasa in India; critical of some practices tied to Sufi shrines

dhimmis

non-Muslims living in a Muslim-ruled state

faskh

annulment of a marriage either automatically or by judicial opinion under specific conditions

fatwa

a non-binding opinion of a Muslim religious authority on a point of law

fiqh

literally, understanding; Muslim jurists' understanding and views on religious and legal matters; jurisprudence

firqa

sect

ghairat

honour

ginans

religious songs sung daily in Khoja Ismaili *jamatkhanas* ('houses of gathering' or places of worship)

gits

songs celebrating the Imam; common among Shias

hadith

accounts of the deeds, teachings and thoughts of Prophet Muhammad

hajj

the pilgrimage to Mecca

(p.354) *hijab*

veiling; modesty; often used only to refer to the head covering of a Muslim woman

hijrat

the migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mekka to Medina in 622 C.E. from which dates the Muslim hijri calendar

hudood

punishments prescribed by the Qur'an or Sunnah

ijma

consensus, especially relating to matters of Islamic legal interpretation

ijtihad

the application of human reason to arrive at an understanding of Islamic principle

jahiliyya

lack of religious understanding; sometimes used to refer to the period before Islam and by Islamists and some others to describe the contemporary period of deviation

jamatkhana

a meeting place of Ismailis for religious purposes

jannah

paradise

jihad

struggle - within oneself against evil or a legitimate war against non-Muslims

jiziya

tax imposed on non-Muslims in a Muslim state

kafir

unbeliever

khilafat

temporal authority associated with Islamic rule; literally, successor; Khalifa was the title of Muslim rulers succeeding Muhammad

khudi

self; vanity; given a positive connotation in the twentieth century by the poet Iqbal as self-empowerment, self-respect

madrasa

a religious school

mahr

the marriage portion settled on the bride by the groom before marriage

Mappila

name applied to Malayalam-speaking Muslims of northern Kerala

māppiḷlai

the Tamil word used for groom in Muslim regions of south India and Sri Lanka

Maraikkāyar

prestigious title among Muslims in Tamil-speaking areas along the Coromandel Coast; historically associated with maritime trade

(p.355) *maslak*

a denomination or religious orientation

maulana

title given to a person esteemed for religious learning; in Sri Lanka, a common term for *sayyid* or descendant of the Prophet's family; the equivalent of *tangal* in Kerala.

maulvi

a man learned in religion

millat

religious community

mubtadi

a heretic; an innovator

mufassirin

persons trained to interpret and comment on the Koran

mujrim

a criminal

mulk

land, country

mullah

a person learned in Islamic law and religion

munazara

dispute over Muslim doctrines; formal debate among representatives of various religions

nass

a clear legal injunction; in Shia Islam, the nomination of an *imam* by an existing *imam*

nikāh

marriage registration; signing of the Islamic marriage contract

nizam

a framework, structure or order; the vision of an Islamic *nizam* given to all society is a central tenet of twentieth-century Islamism

nizam-e-mustafa

the rule or order of the Prophet Muhammad

pasmanda

oppressed, backward

pir

religious elder and spiritual guide; hereditary descendant of a Sufi

saint

qazf

bearing false witness; the crime in Islamic law of false accusation of illicit intercourse

qaum

community, descent group or nation

Rāvuttar

term denoting a category of Tamil Muslims, sometimes deemed to be of lower status than *Maraikkāyar* (see above)

sahaba

companions of Prophet Muhammad

salat

prayer

salwaar kameez

trousers and long shirt, a common dress in north India

shahada

the Islamic attestation of faith; testimony that certain events occurred, especially in relation to adultery, debt, and divorce

(p.356) *shariah*

Islamic law or morality; historically, not codified

sharīf

noble, cultivated

shilanyas

foundation stones and the laying of them

shirk

worship of multiple gods; polytheism

strīdhana

Sanskrit term meaning ‘woman’s property’ or dowry

sulh

reconciliation, settlement

sunna

actions and sayings of Prophet Mohammad.

ta’lim

education

tafseer

the interpretation of holy scriptures

talaq-nama

statement of divorce

tāli

gold pendant tied around a woman’s neck at marriage in a number of south Indian communities

taqlid

traditionalism; following long-established practice in religious matters; adherence to one of the schools of law

tawhid

doctrine of the oneness of God

thakim

tradition of the authority of Shia *imams*

ulama

religiously learned men

ummah

the universal community of Muslims

waqf

charitable Muslim trusts

watan

land of one's birth

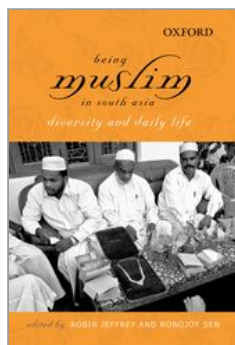
zakat

obligatory charitable giving

zina

fornication and adultery

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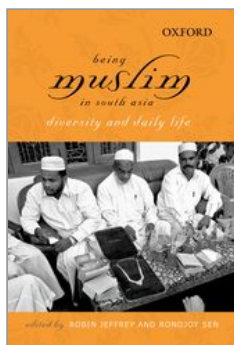
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